

Weekly Compilation of
**Presidential
Documents**



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WEEKLY COMPILATION OF

PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

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Week Ending Friday, August 31, 2007

The President's Radio Address

August 25, 2007

Good morning. This week, I traveled to Kansas City to address the annual convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. I spoke about the ideological struggle that our Nation faces in the 21st century and the lessons we can draw from the advance of freedom in Asia in the 20th century. America's enduring presence and perseverance on that continent aided the rise of democracy, helped transform American enemies into American allies, and made our country safer.

Next week, I will address the members of the American Legion at their annual convention in Reno. In that speech, I will focus on the Middle East and why the rise of a free and democratic Iraq is critical to the future of this vital region and to our Nation's security.

I will also provide an update on the developments we are seeing from our new strategy in Iraq. Every month since January, U.S. forces have killed or captured an average of more than 1,500 Al Qaida terrorists and other extremists. And in June, our troops launched a surge of operations that is helping bring former Sunni insurgents into the fight against Al Qaida, clear the terrorists out of population centers, and give families in liberated Iraqi cities a safer and more normal life.

As security improves, more Iraqis are stepping forward to defend their democracy. Young Iraqi men are signing up for the army. Iraqi police are now patrolling the streets. Coalition and Iraqi forces have doubled the number of joint operations. As the Iraqi people feel more secure, they are also forming neighborhood watch groups. They're volunteering important information about the terrorists and extremists hiding in their midst. And the increase in tips helps account for the marked reduction in sectarian murders.

By driving out the terrorists from cities and neighborhoods, we're creating the conditions

for reconciliation, especially at the local level. In communities across Iraq, citizens are seeing their local and Provincial governments return to operation. Despite continuing violence, leaders in places like Anbar, Najaf, and Ninawa are now working through local Provincial councils to approve funds to finance the rebuilding of homes and neighborhoods, to fight corruption, and to create new jobs.

Here at home, it can be easy to overlook the bravery shown by Iraqi troops and Iraqi civilians who are in the fight for freedom. But our troops on the ground see it every day. Last week, a team of American soldiers was meeting with an Iraqi citizens group near Baghdad. Suddenly, a suicide bomber came running around a corner and headed straight for our soldiers and the Iraqi civilians.

One Iraqi man saw what was happening and ran to intercept the bomber. As he pushed the terrorist away, the bomb detonated, killing both men, but sparing four American soldiers and eight Iraqi civilians. Army Staff Sergeant Sean Kane is one of those who says he owes his life to this brave Iraqi. Sergeant Kane says, "He could have run behind us or away from us, but he made the decision to sacrifice himself to protect everyone." Sergeant Kane spoke to the Iraqi man's father, who said that even if his son had known the outcome beforehand, he "[would not] have acted differently."

The story does not end there. Later that same night, the citizens group contacted the local director of the National Police and told him the location of the Al Qaida cell believed to be responsible for the attack. The National Police immediately conducted a raid that resulted in four arrests.

We are still in the early stages of our new operations. But the success of the past couple of months have shown that conditions on the ground can change—and they are changing. We cannot expect the new strategy we are carrying out to bring success overnight. But by standing with the Iraqi people as they

build their democracy, we will deliver a devastating blow to Al Qaida, we will help provide new hope for millions of people throughout the Middle East, we will gain a friend and ally in the war on terror, and we will make the American people safer.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 8:20 a.m. on August 24 at the Bush Ranch in Crawford, TX, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on August 25. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 24 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks on the Resignation of Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales in Waco, Texas

August 27, 2007

This morning Attorney General Alberto Gonzales announced that he will leave the Department of Justice after 2½ years of service to the Department. Al Gonzales is a man of integrity, decency, and principle. And I have reluctantly accepted his resignation, with great appreciation for the service that he has provided for our country.

As Attorney General and before that as White House Counsel, Al Gonzales has played a critical role in shaping our policies in the war on terror and has worked tirelessly to make this country safer. The PATRIOT Act, the Military Commissions Act, and other important laws bear his imprint. Under his leadership, the Justice Department has made a priority of protecting children from Internet predators and made enforcement of civil rights laws a top priority. He aggressively and successfully pursued public corruption and effectively combated gang violence.

As Attorney General, he played an important role in helping to confirm two fine jurists in Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Samuel Alito. He did an outstanding job as White House Counsel, identifying and recommending the best nominees to fill critically important Federal court vacancies.

Alberto Gonzales's tenure as Attorney General and White House Counsel is only part of a long history of distinguished public

service that began as a young man when, after high school, he enlisted in the United States Air Force. When I became Governor of Texas in 1995, I recruited him from one of Texas's most prestigious law firms to be my general counsel. He went on to become Texas's 100th secretary of state and to serve on our State's supreme court. In the long course of our work together, this trusted adviser became a close friend.

These various positions have required sacrifice from Al, his wife, Becky, their sons, Jared, Graham, and Gabriel. And I thank them for their service to the country.

After months of unfair treatment that has created a harmful distraction at the Justice Department, Judge Gonzales decided to resign his position, and I accept his decision. It's sad that we live in a time when a talented and honorable person like Alberto Gonzales is impeded from doing important work because his good name was dragged through the mud for political reasons.

I've asked Solicitor General Paul Clement to serve as Acting Attorney General upon Alberto Gonzales's departure and until a nominee has been confirmed by the Senate. He's agreed to do so. Paul is one of the finest lawyers in America. As Solicitor General, Paul has developed a reputation for excellence and fairness and earned the respect and confidence of the entire Justice Department.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:50 a.m. at the Texas State Technical College Airport. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks Congratulating Iraqi Leaders at Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico

August 27, 2007

I congratulate Iraq's leaders on the agreement reached yesterday in Baghdad. I've been briefed on the agreement, and this

morning I spoke to Iraq's elected leaders. These leaders represent all the Iraqi communities. These leaders—Prime Minister Maliki, President Talabani, Vice President Hashimi, Vice President Abd Al-Mahdi, President Barzani—recognize the true and meaningful reconciliation that needs to take place, and they recognize this is a process. Yesterday's agreement reflects their commitment to work together for the benefit of all Iraqis to further the process.

The agreement begins to establish new power-sharing agreements, commits to supporting bottom-up security and political initiatives, and advances agreement among Iraq's leadership on several key legislative benchmarks.

While yesterday's agreement is an important step, I reminded them, and they understand, much more needs to be done. The Iraqi Parliament will convene again in early September, and it will need to act to codify this political progress.

It's in our interests that we help the Iraqi people succeed. Success in Iraq will be a major blow to the extremists and radicals who would like to attack America again. And that's why the United States will continue to support Iraq's leaders and all the Iraqi people in their efforts to overcome the forces of terror that seek to overthrow a nascent democracy.

In this regard, I welcome and accept the expressed desire of the Iraqi leadership to develop a long-term relationship with the United States based on common interests. The United States is committed to developing this relationship and to strengthening diplomatic, economic, and security ties with the Iraqi Government and its people.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:33 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, President Jalal Talabani, and Vice Presidents Tariq al-Hashimi and Adil Abd Al-Mahdi of Iraq; and Masoud Barzani, president, Kurdistan region in Iraq. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks at a Reception for Congressional Candidate David G. Reichert and the Washington State Republican Party in Bellevue, Washington

August 27, 2007

Thank you all. Thanks for coming. I appreciate it. Thanks for coming. How's your elbow, Dave? *[Laughter]* First of all, I thank you all for supporting an honest, decent, hard-working, fine American in Dave Reichert. You call him "the sheriff." I look at him as a sheriff. He's tough when he has to be; he's compassionate when he needs to be; and he's an independent thinker. He's the kind of person who has done a fabulous job in the United States House of Representatives, and he deserves to be reelected. And I thank you for supporting him. I particularly want to thank Julie for standing with Dave—and the family.

I know something about families and politics. Like Dave, I married above my head. *[Laughter]* And Laura sends her very best to the Reichert family. She's a—I left her on the ranch this morning. We're working our way back to Washington, DC. I'm going to Australia to represent the United States of America at what they call APEC. By the way, there's no greater honor than to represent the United States of America overseas. It is a fantastic experience. We're such a fabulous country of decent, honorable people.

I want to thank my friend, the former Senator of the State, Slade Gorton, and Sally, for joining us today. Senator, thank you for being here. Luke, I want to thank you for being here. Thanks for being the chairman. Use this—*[applause]*—yes. You need to put this money to good use and turn out the vote, get people to the polls.

We run for reasons. We've got a philosophy that works. We believe in strong defense. We need to protect this country. We believe in human rights and human dignity, and we believe in keeping your taxes low. That's what we believe.

I want to thank Matt Hasselbeck and Mack Strong. These are champs. These men are champs on the field, and they're champs off the field. And they set such a fine example for people who look at the Seattle Seahawks,

and they look at these players and say, “Gosh, I’d like to be like them.” And I thank you for being such good family men, setting such a good example for the kids here. And I’m honored to have the jersey.

I want to talk about a couple of issues with you. We’re a nation at war. I wish I didn’t have to say that. No President should ever want to come to any community in our country and say, “We’re at war,” but we are. And the fundamental question facing this Nation is, how do we face this conflict? What do we do?

The most important priority of government—it’s one of the reasons I’m such a strong believer in Dave—is to protect the homeland. That’s our most important job. And Dave Reichert understands that. He understands that it’s possible for government to balance the need to understand the enemy and civil liberties. And we’re doing just that. He knows what I know, that we’ve got to use all assets at our power to protect you.

You know, I was deeply affected on September the 11th, 2001. I vowed that day that I would use all of our assets to keep the enemy from harming us again. And I’m proud to have an ally in Dave Reichert, who understands that as well. That’s why you’ve got to send him back.

The stakes are high. There are some—I recognize there are some who hear we’re at war and dismiss that as empty political talk. That’s either disingenuous or naive—either case it is dangerous because we face an enemy that is ideologically bent, determined to achieve their objectives and murder the innocent. They are not religious people. They may have hijacked religion, but they’re not religious. I don’t believe you murder innocent people to achieve political objectives and be a religious person. I just don’t believe that. As a matter of fact, I believe that’s the definition of evil. And I think the United States must do everything we can to prevent them from harming us and others again.

And the stakes are high in this war. Our strategy is to stay on the offense. I would rather defeat them overseas than to face them here at home. And so every day, you’ve got really fine, decent people working hour after hour to find these killers and to bring them to justice. You can’t negotiate with

these kind of people; you can’t talk sense to them. The only thing—the way to protect us in the short term is to find them before they hurt us again. And that’s what’s happening every single day.

Dave Reichert understands it. He is a strong supporter of law enforcement, of the intelligence community, and of the United States military. And I appreciate that, Dave.

In the long run, the best way to protect you is to win this ideological struggle by defeating what they believe with something that has worked throughout history, and that’s liberty. I make my decisions based on just some fundamental principles—principles, by the way, I’m not going to change; principles that—you know, I think the thing that matters most in life is when you finish the task at hand, whatever that may be, that you can look in the mirror and say you stayed true to your principles; you stayed true to that which you believe. I’d rather be dealing with people who make decisions based upon what’s right, not based upon the latest focus group or opinion poll. And that’s exactly what we need to do to protect this country.

I believe there’s an Almighty, and I believe a great gift of the Almighty to each man, woman, and child on the face of the Earth is freedom. And I believe it’s in the interest of the United States to help people be free. Freedom yields the peace we want. Freedom yields the—lays that foundation for peace so our children can grow up in a peaceful world. And that’s what you’re seeing happening right now.

Iraq is the central front of this war. This war is being fought on a variety of fronts, and Iraq, obviously, is the central front. It’s the front that’s dominating the news. It’s the front that appears on your TV screens. It’s the front in which there’s a lot of debate in a free society, and there should be debate. I happen to believe it’s essential that we win this war in Iraq, that we do the job on this front.

We’ve done some remarkable things there. First of all, we removed a brutal dictator. Getting rid of Saddam Hussein made the world safer. It was the right decision. The Iraqis went to the polls and wrote a Constitution. I mean, I wasn’t surprised they went to the polls. If you believe in the universality

of freedom, it shouldn't surprise you that people, if given a chance, will express their desire to be free. I wasn't surprised; I was pleased that 12 million people defied the car bombers and killers and murderers to vote.

And then the thinking enemy, recognizing that a free society in the Middle East would be a major blow to their ambitions to spread their caliphate throughout the Middle East, tried to create sectarian violence. They murdered the innocent in order to cause people to doubt government and doubt the coalition. These are coldblooded killers. These, by the way, have sworn allegiance to—many of them have sworn allegiance to Usama bin Laden, the same person that ordered the attacks that killed nearly 3,000 of our citizens. They can't stand the thought of a free society in their midst. An Iraq that can govern itself and sustain itself and be an ally against these radicals and extremists would be a major defeat in this ideological struggle.

And so they struck. And I was confronted with a decision: You either leave, pull back, or send more troops in to try to bring enough security so that the society can emerge and evolve. And I chose the latter. I chose the latter because the consequences of failure in Iraq are enormous for the security of the United States of America.

I gave a speech to the VFW the other day and talked about the different theaters of war in the past, whether it be Japan or Korea and Vietnam. I reminded the listeners, Vietnam was much different from Iraq in that you could leave Vietnam, and yeah, there was a human toll, huge human catastrophe as a result of us leaving, but the enemy wasn't going to follow us here. In the beginning of the 21st century, failure in Iraq would cause the enemy not to retreat, but to follow us to America. The stakes of success for your security are enormous. And that is why I listened to our commanders and the experts and military folks about how to provide enough security for democracy to have a chance to succeed.

I sent a new commander there on the ground, a fellow named General David Petraeus. We've been there for—fully staffed and engaged for about 2 months, with a full complement of manpower, and we're making a difference. It's changing on the ground.

The people are beginning to see that grass-roots reconciliation is possible. Neighbors—listen, people want to live in peace. People don't like violence. They want their children to grow up in a peaceful world. If given a chance, I believe people will cling to liberty and freedom. And I know it's in our interests for us to deny Al Qaida a safe haven or the extremists an opportunity to become more emboldened throughout the Middle East. What happens in Iraq matters in America.

And that's why I've asked Congress to wait until these commanders come back—the Ambassador and commander come back and tell people exactly what's happening. You know, when they open up a new school in Iraq, it doesn't make headline news. When Al Qaida kills a bunch of people, it does. And these folks are trying to shake our will. I'm giving a speech to the American Legion tomorrow, and a line in there is, "We will not be intimidated by thugs and murderers. The United States of America will stand strong."

I'm confident we can succeed. I really am. I could not look at a mother whose child was in combat if I didn't believe, one, it was necessary, and two, we can succeed. I couldn't do that in good conscience. And one of the reasons I'm confident we can succeed is because we have done this kind of work before.

I like to remind people about the story of my dad and my Presidency. I find it incredibly ironic that George H.W. Bush went straight out of high school, became a Navy fighter pilot, and fought the Japanese, and some 60 years later, his son sits down at the table with the Prime Minister of Japan, the former enemy, working to keep the peace. Isn't that interesting? I think it is. And you know what happens? Liberty has got the capacity to change an enemy into an ally. Liberty and freedom have—are transformative. They've got the ability to transform an entire region, one of hopelessness, where 19 kids are willing to get on an airplane to kill, to one of hope, where people realize a better future and a peaceful future.

This is a long ideological struggle we're involved in. And the fundamental question is, will the United States of America take the lead? Will we be confident in the values that have made us a great nation? And I answered that question loud and clear: We're in the

lead; we'll stay in the lead; and we'll work for the peace that we all want.

You know, every time you run, at least every time I've run, the economy has always been an issue. And I'm glad it is this time around. *[Laughter]* We have—I can remember campaigning in Washington State and campaigning with Dave before and reminding people of another principle that I believe in, and that is, you can spend your money better than government can. There is a kind of a philosophical divide in Washington. There are people that, one, don't—believe we don't have enough money in Washington—I happen to believe we do—and secondly, that they would rather figure out how to spend your money than you should.

You know—and so our argument, however, wins when you look at the facts. We had to deal with a recession, an attack on the country, corporate scandals. This economy was not very good in the beginning of my administration. So I went to Congress and said, "I've got an idea for us to get out of this recession. Why don't we let the people have more of their own money? Rather than taking money away from the spenders and savers and investors, why don't we try something different? Why don't we say, 'Here, you can have your own money in your own pocket so you can spend it yourself?'"

And it worked. Since August of 2003—by the way, we didn't cut taxes on a few people; we cut taxes on everybody that paid taxes. It wasn't one of these special deals where you paid some, and you paid some, but you get the tax break; you don't. If you have a family with children, you got a tax break. I happen to think it was a mistake to penalize marriage. We had a marriage penalty in the Tax Code. It seems like to me, we ought to be encouraging marriage rather than penalizing marriage.

We cut taxes on dividends and capital gains to encourage investment. We cut taxes on small businesses, and we reduced all the income tax rates. And by the way, most small businesses pay tax at the individual income tax rate. See, if you're a subchapter S or a limited partnership, you pay income tax based upon individual rates. And so when you say you're cutting the individual rates, you're actually cutting taxes as well on small

businesses. Seventy percent of new jobs are created by small businesses, and so when a small business has more money in its treasury, it tends to expand and invest. When a consumer has more money in his or her pocket, they either save or invest or spend.

And our plan worked. Cutting taxes works. Cutting taxes has created a strong economy. We've created 8.3 million new jobs since August of 2003. Unemployment rates are down. People are working; inflation is low; interest rates are low; people are owning homes. This economy is strong. And the best way to keep it strong is to put people in Congress that won't raise your taxes.

And make no mistake about it, the Democrats are going to raise your taxes, pure and simple. They may say they're not going to in the campaign, but they're going to raise your taxes. How do I know? Well, they submitted a budget recently. Their budget calls for \$205 billion of extra discretionary spending over the next 5 years. That's their blueprint for what they're going to do with your money—205 billion additional dollars. That averages out to \$112 million a day, \$4.7 million per hour, \$78,000 per minute, \$1,300 in higher discretionary spending every second of every minute of every hour of every day of every year for the next 5 years. And you're going to pay for it. That's why we need to reelect Dave Reichert. And that's why they give the President the power of veto. I'm going to veto any tax threats.

What's interesting is that we were able to cut taxes and grow the economy and, at the same time, reduce our deficit. That's what we told the people we would do. We said, "Give us a chance. You're going to have more money in your own pocket to spend, save, and invest, and we're going to manage this fiscal house in such a way that the deficit comes down." Today, the projected deficit is about 205 billion—that's a nice number; that's what the Democrats are going to take out of your pocket; that's the size of the deficit, which, by the way, as a percentage of GDP is low.

And I've submitted a budget that will actually balance the budget by 2012, so long as

we have fiscally responsible people in Washington. And that means we need to elect people who understand what it means to set priorities. And the number-one priority, as far as I'm concerned, is to protecting the American people. The number-one priority is to make sure our troops have the support they need and to make sure our veterans get the care they need.

And Dave is right there. You can count on him. You can count on him to be a watchdog for your money in Washington, DC.

I want to talk about one other issue, and that is—it's a national security issue; it's an economic security issue; and it is an environmental issue—and that is our dependency on oil. Now, that probably comes as a shock to you to hear a Texan say that, but I understand what it means to be dependent on a product from parts of the world where some of the people don't like us. I know what that means for our national security.

I also understand, in this world we live in, when demand for crude oil goes up in a developing country like China and the corresponding supply doesn't keep up with the demand, the price of gasoline goes up at the pump here in Seattle, Washington. So it's an economic security issue as well. If the terrorists and these radicals that would like to create economic havoc on the United States were ever to be able to significantly disrupt the oil supply, you'd feel it. So it's an economic security issue. And obviously, burning fossil fuels creates an environmental issue.

And so I look forward to working with Dave to come up with a practical plan that enables us, one, to grow the economy and, at the same time, to become less dependent on oil and better stewards of the environment. And our strategy makes sense. It's a commonsense strategy.

First, I believe that we can grow enough fuel to become less dependent on oil. I'd rather our farmers be producing fuel than buying fuel from overseas. I think that's a practical application of technology. We're selling a little—we're using a little more than 7 billion gallons of ethanol now, made mainly from Midwestern corn. In other words, there's a whole industry growing. And we're encouraging it. As a matter of fact, we believe that technology is going to advance to the

point where we can reduce our gasoline usage by 20 percent over the next 10 years and replace it with alternative fuels. I believe that.

Your government is spending a fair amount of your money—if billions is fair—[*laughter*]*—a lot of your money on technologies because the truth of the matter is, the only way to be able to grow our economy and, at the same time, be better stewards of the environment is to come up with new technologies. It's conceivable that relatively quickly, there are going to be automobiles where you can drive your first 40 miles on a battery and the thing you're in doesn't look like a golf cart. It will actually be a car, something that you'd like to be in. [Laughter]*

I'm a big believer in clean coal technologies. We're spending up to about \$2 billion to be able to use this plentiful supply of energy in an environmentally friendly way. And I think there's going to be some breakthroughs coming down the road.

I believe in nuclear power. I believe if you're really, truly interested in greenhouse gases, then you ought to be supporting nuclear power. If you're really that concerned about the environment, you ought to be saying, this great economy of ours can grow and, at the same time, not pollute. Nuclear power doesn't put one emission into the atmosphere.

And so we're spending money to come up with technologies that will enable us to be less dependent on oil. And I think it makes sense. And I'm proud to have Dave's support. He's an environmentally conscious guy. He cares about the environment, like a lot of people around the country do. But I want to tell you something that's interesting and something you probably haven't spent much time reading about. Do you realize that the United States is the only major industrialized nation that cut greenhouse gases last year? We grew our economy by 3.4 percent in the second quarter, and we cut greenhouse gases.

Our strategy is working. Our philosophy makes sense. It is a commonsense philosophy that's making a difference in the lives of the average citizens. David Reichert understands that, and that's why you need to send him

back to the United States Congress. And I'm proud to be here for him.

Thanks for coming. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:28 p.m. at the Hyatt Regency. In his remarks, he referred to Luke Esser, chairman, Washington State Republican Party; Matt Hasselbeck, quarterback, and Mack Strong, fullback, Seattle Seahawks; Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan.

Statement on the Death of Police Officer Germaine Casey

August 27, 2007

Officer Germaine Casey of the Rio Rancho Police Department died today from injuries suffered while serving as a member of my security detail in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I am deeply saddened by his death and extraordinarily grateful for his protection. It is a high calling to choose to serve and protect your fellow citizens, and I will always be indebted to Officer Casey's service.

He leaves behind his wife, Lisa, and their two children. They are in my thoughts and prayers. May God comfort the Casey family and his fellow law enforcement officials.

Remarks at the American Legion National Convention in Reno, Nevada

August 28, 2007

Thank you all very much. Thank you all. Please be seated. Commander, thank you very much for the invitation to come. I'm honored to be here. I'm honored to represent Post 77 of Houston, Texas. I hope my fellow Texans behave themselves here in Reno. [Laughter] You won't? Okay, well—[laughter].

I appreciate the fact that nearly every community in America has been enriched by the American Legion and the Women's Auxiliary. I appreciate the work that you do to remind our citizens about the blessings of America. You have the profound gratitude of the Presi-

dent and the people of this country. Thank you for your service.

I particularly appreciate the work you do with our country's young. I like the fact that you have a oratorical competition that, according to your organization, helps Americans communicate their ideas clearly and effectively. Paul suggested I might want to sign up. [Laughter] I appreciate the fact that through Boys and Girls Nation, you teach young people who are interested in public service about how Washington really works. [Laughter] I'm not going there. [Laughter]

We meet today at a critical time for our country. America is engaged in a great ideological struggle, fighting Islamic extremists across the globe. Today I want to talk to you and to the American people about a key aspect of the struggle: the fight for the future of the Middle East. I'm going to explain why defeating the extremists in this troubled region is essential to our Nation's security and why success in Iraq is vital to winning this larger ideological battle.

I do want to thank your commander. It's been my pleasure to work with Paul. He's been in the White House a lot, along with the executive director, John Sommer. He's represented you well, and he's served with distinction. I thank JoAnn Cronin, the national president of the American Legion Auxiliary. I appreciate Bob Spanogle, the national adjutant of the American Legion.

I want to welcome the Governor of the great State of Nevada with us today—Governor Jim Gibbons is with us. Mr. Governor, thanks for coming. The Congressman from this district is a fine Representative named Dean Heller. His wife, Lynne, sang the national anthem. Thank you both for being here today.

I'm honored to be in the presence of those who wear our Nation's uniform. I thank General Charles Campbell, commanding general, U.S. Army Forces Command, for joining us—Major General Gale Pollock, Acting Surgeon General of the U.S. Army. And for all those who wear the uniform, thank you for volunteering to defend this Nation in a time of peril. I'm proud to be your Commander in Chief.

For nearly a century, Presidents have looked to the American Legion to provide

an example of vision, valor, and love of country. In times of peace, you counseled vigilance. In times of war, you counseled resolve. And in every era, you have carried the well-being of our men and women in uniform in your prayers and in your hearts. We're grateful to your service.

You have an appreciation for how special America is because you have defended her. You know how fragile freedom is because you have seen it under attack. And you know the pain of war because you have lost friends and family members on distant shores, including those whose fates are still unknown. We must not and we will not end our search until we have accounted for every member of our Armed Forces from every war and every corner of the Earth.

I appreciate your efforts to honor the American flag. There are those who say the flag is just a piece of cloth. That's not the view of those who bled for it and saw it drape the caskets of some of our finest men and women. It was the American flag that we planted proudly on Iwo Jima, that first graced the silver surface of the Moon. The country is careful to protect many things because of what they symbolize. Surely we can find a way to show equal respect for the symbol that our soldiers and sailors and airmen and marines and coast guards men and women have risked their lives for—the flag of our Nation. So today I join the Legion in calling on the United States Congress to make protection of the flag the law of our land.

I also thank you for your strong support of our Nation's veterans. We share a common goal: to make sure our veterans have all the help they need. We have worked together to achieve that goal. The budget this year that I submitted is nearly \$87 billion for our veterans. That's a 77-percent increase since I took office. It is the highest level of support for veterans in America's history.

I know health care is a concern of yours, and that's why we've extended treatment to a million additional veterans, including hundreds of thousands of men and women returning from Afghanistan and Iraq. We're building new VA facilities in places where veterans are returning so more veterans can get top-quality health care closer to your home. We've expanded grants to help home-

less veterans in all 50 States and the District of Columbia. My point is this: The veterans were there when we needed them, and this administration will be with the veterans when they need us.

Perhaps the most important duty that Legion members undertake is to serve as living reminders that a great country has great responsibilities. Once again, America finds itself a nation at war. Once again, we're called to assume the mantle of global leadership. And once again, the American Legion is walking point. I thank you for your fervent and enthusiastic defense of our men and women in uniform as they take the fight to the enemy in Afghanistan, in Iraq, and across the world. They're the finest military on Earth, and we are right to be proud of them.

Many people in this country are asking whether the fight underway today is worth it. This is not the first time Americans have asked that question. We always enter wars reluctantly, yet we have fought whenever dangers came. We fought when turmoil in Europe threatened to shroud the world in darkness. America sent its military to fight two bitter and bloody conflicts—we did what we had to do to get the job done. We fought when powers in Asia attacked our country and our allies. We sent Americans to restore the peace, and we did what we had to do to get the job done. And we responded when radicals and extremists attacked our homeland in the first ideological war of the 21st century. We toppled two regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq that gave harbor to terrorists, defied the international community, and threatened the security of our Nation. And now we're working to help build free and secure societies in their place. And like the past, we will do what we have to do to get the job done.

We've learned from history that dangers in other parts of the world—such as Europe and Asia—directly affect our security here at home. On September the 11th, 2001, we learned that there's another region of the world that directly threatens the security of the American people, and that is the Middle East. America has enduring and vital interests in the region. Throughout our history, the American people have had strong links with this region through ties of commerce

and education and faith. Long before oil and gas were discovered in the Middle East, the region was a key source of trade. It is the home to three of the world's great religions. It remains a strategic crossroads for the world.

Yet the hope and prosperity that transformed other parts of the world in the 20th century has bypassed too many in the Middle East. For too long, the world was content to ignore forms of government in this region in the name of stability. The result was that a generation of young people grew up with little hope to improve their lives, and many fell under the sway of violent Islamic extremism. The terrorist movement multiplied in strength, and bitterness that had simmered for years boiled into violence across the world. The cradle of civilization became the home of the suicide bomber. And resentments that began on the streets of the Middle East are now killing innocent people in train stations and airplanes and office buildings around the world.

The murderers and beheaders are not the true face of Islam; they are the face of evil. They seek to exploit religion as a path to power and a means to dominate the Middle East. The violent Islamic radicalism that inspires them has two main strains. One is Sunni extremism, embodied by Al Qaida and its terrorist allies. Their organization advances a vision that rejects tolerance, crushes all dissent, and justifies the murder of innocent men, women, and children in the pursuit of political power. We saw this vision in the brutal rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan, where women were publicly whipped, men were beaten for missing prayer meetings, and young girls could not go to school.

These extremists hope to impose that same dark vision across the Middle East by raising up a violent and radical caliphate that spans from Spain to Indonesia. So they kill fellow Muslims in places like Algeria and Jordan and Egypt and Saudi Arabia in an attempt to undermine their Governments. And they kill Americans because they know we stand in their way. And that is why they attacked U.S. Embassies in Africa in 1998 and killed sailors aboard the USS *Cole* in 2001 [2000] *.

* White House correction.

And that is why they killed nearly 3,000 people on 9/11. And that is why they plot to attack us again. And that is why we must stay in the fight until the fight is won.

The other strain of radicalism in the Middle East is Shi'a extremism, supported and embodied by the regime that sits in Tehran. Iran has long been a source of trouble in the region. It is the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism. Iran backs Hizballah, who are trying to undermine the democratic Government of Lebanon. Iran funds terrorist groups like Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which murder the innocent and target Israel and destabilize the Palestinian Territories. Iran is sending arms to the Taliban in Afghanistan, which could be used to attack American and NATO troops. Iran has arrested visiting American scholars, who have committed no crimes and pose no threat to their regime. And Iran's active pursuit of technology that could lead to nuclear weapons threatens to put a region already known for instability and violence under the shadow of a nuclear holocaust.

Iran's actions threaten the security of nations everywhere. And that is why the United States is rallying friends and allies around the world to isolate the regime, to impose economic sanctions. We will confront this danger, before it is too late.

I want our fellow citizens to consider what would happen if these forces of radicalism and extremism are allowed to drive us out of the Middle East. The region would be dramatically transformed in a way that could imperil the civilized world. Extremists of all strains would be emboldened by the knowledge that they forced America to retreat. Terrorists could have more safe havens to conduct attacks on Americans and our friends and allies. Iran could conclude that we were weak and could not stop them from gaining nuclear weapons. And once Iran had nuclear weapons, it would set off a nuclear arms race in the region.

Extremists would control a key part of the world's energy supply, could blackmail and sabotage the global economy. They could use billions of dollars of oil revenues to buy weapons and pursue their deadly ambitions. Our allies in the region would be under greater siege by the enemies of freedom.

Early movements toward democracy in the region would be violently reversed. This scenario would be a disaster for the people of the Middle East, a danger to our friends and allies, and a direct threat to American peace and security. This is what the extremists plan. For the sake of our own security, we'll pursue our enemies, we'll persevere, and we will prevail.

In the short term, we're using all elements of American power to protect the American people by taking the fight to the enemy. Our troops are carrying out operations day by day to bring the terrorists to justice. We're keeping the pressure on them. We're forcing them to move. Our law enforcement and intelligence professionals are working to cut off terrorist financing and disrupt their networks. Our diplomats are rallying our friends and allies throughout the region to share intelligence and to tighten security and to rout out the extremists hiding in their midst. Every day we work to protect the American people. Our strategy is this: We will fight them over there so we do not have to face them in the United States of America.

In the long term, we are advancing freedom and liberty as the alternative to the ideologies of hatred and repression. We seek a Middle East of secure, democratic states that are at peace with one another, that are participating in the global markets, and that are partners in this fight against the extremists and radicals. We seek to dry up the stream of recruits for Al Qaida and other extremists by helping nations offer their people a path to a more hopeful future. We seek an Iran whose Government is accountable to its people instead of to leaders who promote terror and pursue the technology that could be used to develop nuclear weapons. We seek to advance a two-state solution for the Israelis and Palestinians so they can live side by side in peace and security. We seek justice and dignity and human rights for all the people of the Middle East.

Achieving this future requires hard work, strategic patience over many years, yet our security depends on it. We have done this kind of work before in Europe. We have done this kind of work before in Japan. We have done this kind of work before, and it can be done again.

The future course of the Middle East will turn heavily on the outcome of the fight in Iraq. Iraq is at the heart of the Middle East. And the two dangerous strains of extremism vying for control of the Middle East have now closed in on this country in an effort to bring down the young democracy.

In Iraq, Sunni extremists led by Al Qaida are staging sensational attacks on innocent men, women, and children in attempt to stoke sectarian violence. Their operatives have assassinated those seeking to build a new future for the Iraqi people. Their targets include everyone they consider infidels, including Christians and Jews and Yazidis and Shi'a and even fellow Sunnis who do not share their radical distortion of Islam. Their ranks include foreign fighters who travel to Iraq through Syria. Their operations seek to create images of chaos and carnage to break the will of the American people. These killers don't understand our country. America does not give in to thugs and assassins, and America will not abandon Iraq in its hour of need.

Shi'a extremists backed by Iran are training Iraqis to carry out attacks on our forces and the Iraqi people. Members of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps are supplying extremist groups with funding and weapons, including sophisticated IEDs. And with the assistance of Hizballah, they've provided training for these violent forces inside of Iraq. Recently, coalition forces seized 240-millimeter rockets that had been manufactured in Iran this year and that had been provided to Iraqi extremist groups by Iranian agents. The attacks on our bases and our troops by Iranian-supplied munitions have increased in the last few months, despite pledges by Iran to help stabilize the security situation in Iraq.

Some say Iran's leaders are not aware of what members of their own regime are doing. Others say Iran's leaders are actively seeking to provoke the West. Either way, they cannot escape responsibility for aiding attacks against coalition forces and the murder of innocent Iraqis. The Iranian regime must halt these actions. And until it does, I will take actions necessary to protect our troops. I have authorized our military commanders in Iraq to confront Tehran's murderous activities.

For all those who ask whether the fight in Iraq is worth it, imagine an Iraq where militia groups backed by Iran control large parts of the country. Imagine an Iraq where Al Qaida has established sanctuaries to safely plot future attacks on targets all over the world, including America. We've seen what these enemies will do when American forces are actively engaged in Iraq. And we can envision what they would do if we—if they were emboldened by American forces in retreat.

The challenge in Iraq comes down to this: Either the forces of extremism succeed or the forces of freedom succeed; either our enemies advance their interests in Iraq or we advance our interests. The most important and immediate way to counter the ambitions of Al Qaida and Iran and other forces of instability and terror is to win the fight in Iraq.

Together our coalition has achieved great things in Iraq. We toppled one of the world's most brutal and dangerous dictators. This world is better off without Saddam Hussein in power. The Iraqi people held three national elections, choosing a transitional government, adopting the most progressive and democratic Constitution in the Arab world, and then electing a Government under that Constitution. Despite endless threats from the car bombers and assassins, nearly 12 million Iraqi citizens came out to vote in a show of hope and solidarity that we should never forget.

In 2006, a thinking enemy struck back. The extremists provoked a level of sectarian violence that threatened to unravel the democratic gains the Iraqi people had made. Momentum was shifting to the extremists. The Iraqi people saw that their Government could not protect them or deliver basic services. Many Shi'a turned to militias for security. Many Sunnis did not see a place for them in the new Iraq. Baghdad was descending into chaos. And one of our military intelligence analysts wrote that Anbar Province—Al Qaida's base in Iraq—was lost to the enemy.

Given the stakes in Iraq, given the fact that what happens in Iraq matters in the United States, it became clear that we needed to adjust our approach to address these changes on the ground. So in January, I laid out a new strategy. This strategy was designed to

help bring security to the Iraqi population, especially in Baghdad. It was designed to help clear the terrorists out of Iraqi cities and communities so that local governments could retake control, resume basic services, and help revive businesses in their communities. It was designed to give the Iraqi security forces time to grow in size and capability so that they can ultimately bring security to their country. It was designed to provide a secure environment in which national reconciliation could take place. And it was designed to encourage more members of the international community to recognize their interests in a free and democratic Iraq and to do more to make that possible.

The central objective of this strategy was to aid the rise of an Iraqi Government that can protect its people, deliver basic services, and be an ally in this war on terror. And we understood that none of these goals could be met until the Iraqi people feel safer in their own homes and neighborhoods.

To carry out this new strategy, I sent reinforcements to Baghdad and Anbar Province. I put a new commander in place, General David Petraeus, an expert on counterinsurgency. Those reinforcements have been fully operational for just over 2 months, yet there are unmistakable signs that our strategy is achieving the objectives we set out. Our new strategy is showing results in terms of security.

Our forces are in the fight all over Iraq. Since January, each month we have captured or killed an average of more than 1,500 Al Qaida terrorists and other enemies of Iraq's elected Government. Al Qaida is being displaced from former strongholds in Baghdad and Anbar and Diyala Provinces. We've conducted operations against Iranian agents supplying lethal munitions to extremist groups. We've targeted Shi'a death squads and their supply networks. The Prime Minister of Iraq, Prime Minister Maliki, has courageously committed to pursue the forces of evil and destruction. Sectarian violence has sharply decreased in Baghdad. The momentum is now on our side. The surge is seizing the initiative from the enemy and handing it to the Iraqi people.

Our new strategy is also showing results in places where it matters most, the cities

and neighborhoods where ordinary Iraqis live. In these areas, Iraqis are increasingly reaching accommodations with each other, with the coalition, and with the Government in Baghdad. This reconciliation is coming from the bottom up. It's having an impact in the fight against the enemy, and it's building a solid foundation for a democratic Iraq.

In Anbar, the Province that had been thought to be lost to the enemy is increasingly becoming more peaceful because members of local Sunnis are turning against Al Qaida. They're sick and tired of the dark vision of these murderers. Local sheikhs have joined the American forces to drive the terrorists out of the capital city of Ramadi and elsewhere. Residents are providing critical intelligence, and tribesmen have joined the Iraqi police and security forces.

People want to live in peace. Mothers want to raise their children in a peaceful environment. The local Iraqis, given a chance, are turning against these murderers and extremists.

Many Iraqis who once felt marginalized in a free Iraq are rejoining the political process, and now it's the enemy of a free Iraq that is being left on the margins. Last month, Provincial officials reopened parts of the war-damaged government center with the help of one of our Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Listen, similar scenes are taking place all across Anbar, the Province once thought lost. Virtually every city and every town in the Province now has a mayor and a municipal council. Local officials are forming ties with the central Government in Baghdad because these Sunni leaders now see a role for their people in a new Iraq. And in an encouraging sign, the central Government is beginning to respond with funding for vital services and reconstruction and increased security forces.

In other Provinces, there are also signs of this kind of bottom-up progress. In Diyala Province, the city of Baqubah reopened six banks, providing residents with capital for the local economy. In Ninawa Province, local officials have established a commission to investigate corruption, with a local judge empowered to pursue charges of fraud and racketeering. These are signs that our strategy to encourage political cooperation at the

grassroots level is working. And over time, see—and over time, as the Iraqis take control over their lives at the local level, they will demand more action from their national leaders in Baghdad. That's how democracy works. And that's why the encouraging developments at the local level are so important for Iraq's future.

At the moment, our new strategy is showing fewer results at the national level. Iraq is overcoming decades of tyranny and deprivation, which left scars on Iraq's people and their psyche. The serious sectarian violence of 2006 and early 2007 further tore at the fabric of Iraqi society, increasing distrust between Iraq's ethnic and religious communities. In the midst of the security challenges, Iraq's leaders are being asked to resolve political issues as complex and emotional as the struggle for civil rights in our own country. So it's no wonder that progress is halting and people are often frustrated. The result is that it has been harder for—than anticipated for Iraqis to meet the legislative benchmarks on which we have all been focused.

In my weekly consultations with Ambassador Crocker, we discuss these challenges. We also discuss the signs of hope. We're encouraged by the agreement reached Sunday night by the top leaders in Iraq's Government. They agreed on several draft pieces of legislation that are at the core of national reconciliation and are among the benchmarks identified by the United States Congress. For example, the draft law on de-Ba'athification reform addresses the question of how Iraqis will deal with their past. The draft legislation on Provincial powers tackles how Iraqis will map out their future. These measures still have to be passed by the Iraqi Parliament. Yet the agreement shows that Iraq's leaders can put aside their differences, they can sit down together, and they can work out tough issues central to the fate of their country.

The agreement by Iraq's leaders was significant for another reason. It thanks the coalition for our sacrifices and recognizes the importance of maintaining a coalition presence in Iraq. It also calls for the development of a long-term relationship with the United States. I welcome this invitation. I've committed our Government to negotiating such

a partnership soon. This long-term relationship need not require the level of engagement that we have in Iraq today, but it can serve the common interests of both Iraq and the United States to combat terrorism and to help bring stability to an important country and region.

Iraq's Government still has more work to do to meet many of its legislative benchmarks. Yet it's also important to note that many of the goals behind these benchmarks are being achieved without legislation. Here's an example. Now, we believed that an equitable sharing of oil revenues would require the Iraqi Parliament to pass an oil sharing law. In fact, the national Government is already sharing oil revenues with the Provinces, despite the fact that no formal law has been passed. Iraq's Government is making gains in other important areas. Electricity production is improving. The Parliament has passed about 60 pieces of legislation, including a \$41-billion budget. Despite the slow progress in the Iraqi Parliament—here's the evidence—Iraq as a whole is moving forward.

Our strategy is also showing results at the international level. The United Nations and Iraq, with support from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and nations from around the globe, have finalized an International Compact for Iraq that will bring new economic assistance and debt relief in exchange for aggressive economic reforms. So far, the Iraqis have made significant progress in meeting the IMF's economic benchmarks. The Iraqis have convened a Neighbors Conference that's bringing together nations in the region. The goal is to help the Iraqis through specific security and economic and diplomatic cooperation.

As part of these diplomatic initiatives, Prime Minister Maliki has met with counterparts in Turkey, Syria, and Iran to urge the support for his nation. Saudi Arabia is looking to open a new Embassy in Baghdad. The United Nations Security Council has decided to expand its mission in Iraq and is seeking to help with local elections and reconciliation. The United Nations will soon name a new, high-ranking envoy to Iraq to coordinate the UN's expanded effort to that country. Here's what I'm telling you: The international community increasingly understands

the importance of a free Iraq. They understand a free Iraq is important for world peace. And that is why we'll continue to rally the world for this noble and necessary cause.

All these developments are hopeful—they're hopeful for Iraq, and they're hopeful for the Middle East, and they're hopeful for peace. In 2 weeks, General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker will return to Washington to deliver an interim assessment of the situation on the ground and the prospects for the future. This status report comes less than 3 months after the surge became fully operational. It will likely assess what's going well in Iraq and what needs to be improved and what changes we need to make in our strategy and force deployments in the months ahead. Congress asked for this assessment. Congress should listen to it in its entirety. And I ask Members of the Congress to withhold any conclusions until they can hear these men out.

Unfortunately, some who had complained about a lack of security in Iraq are now attempting to change the terms of the debate. Their argument used to be that security was bad, so the surge has failed. Now their argument seems to be security is better, so the surge has failed. They disregard the political advances on the local level and instead change—charge that the slow pace of legislative progress on the national level proves our strategy has not worked. This argument gets it backwards. Improving security is the precondition for making gains in other areas.

Senator Joe Lieberman puts it this way: "While it is true there is no pure 'military' solution to the violence in Iraq, it is worth remembering that neither is there any pure 'political' solution." Security progress must come first. And only then can political progress follow—first locally and then in Baghdad. So it's going to take time for the recent progress we have seen in security to translate into political progress. In short, it makes no sense to respond to military progress by claiming that we have failed because Iraq's Parliament has yet to pass every law it said it would.

The American people know how difficult democracy can be. Our own country has an advanced and sophisticated political system in place. Yet even we can't pass a budget

on time, and we've had 200 years of practice. Prime Minister Maliki and other Iraqi leaders are dealing with the issues far more controversial and complicated, and they are trying to do it all at once, after decades of a brutal dictatorship. Iraq's leaders aren't perfect, but they were elected by their people. They want what we want: a free Iraq that fights terrorists instead of harboring them. And leaders in Washington need to look for ways to help our Iraqi allies succeed, not excuses for abandoning them.

The challenge is before us—the challenge before us is hard, but America can meet it. And the conflict has come at a cost, on behalf of a cause that is right and essential to the American people. It's a noble cause. It is a just cause. It is a necessary cause. I wouldn't have asked the young men and women of our military to go in harm's way if I didn't think success in Iraq was necessary for the security of the United States of America. I know it can be difficult to see sometimes, but what happens on the streets of Baghdad and in the neighborhoods of Anbar has a direct impact on the safety of Americans here at home. And that is why we're in this fight, and that's why we'll stay in the fight, and that is why we're going to win this fight.

One of the great blessings of this country is that our men and women in uniform understand it. One of those young men was Specialist First Class Steven Davis of Fayetteville, North Carolina. Steven came from a proud military family. His father and grandfather were veterans. His younger brother, his mother, and her father were all stationed with him in Iraq.

When Steven was killed by an insurgent grenade on the Fourth of July, their hearts were broken. And yet somehow this remarkable family found a way to put aside their grief and continue to serve our country. Steven's mother said that Steven was proud of what they were doing in Iraq, so 6 days after the funeral, she went back on duty as a medic. His father, Buck, a gulf war veteran, says he wants to go to Iraq today. This family represents the best of the American spirit—a spirit that shows we have the grit and the will to defend the American people.

One day years from now, another President will be in a room like this. That Presi-

dent will look out upon a sea of caps worn by those who show a quiet pride in their service. Some in that audience will include people who won the fight against fascism and nazism and communism. You'll be joined by younger veterans who have fought in places like Kandahar and Ramadi. And just like you, the new generation of veterans will be able to say proudly they held fast against determined and ruthless enemies, helped salvage an entire region from tyranny and terror, and made a safer world for the American people.

To those future members of the American Legion and to all of you, I offer the gratitude of our Nation, and I offer my prayers for a future of peace. Thank you. And may God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:14 a.m. at the Reno-Sparks Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Paul A. Morin, national commander, American Legion; Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey; President Bashar al-Asad of Syria; and President Mahmud Ahmadi-nejad of Iran.

Statement on the National Economy *August 28, 2007*

When we keep taxes low, spending in check, and our economy open—conditions that empower businesses to create new jobs—all Americans benefit. Census Bureau data released today confirms that more of our citizens are doing better in this economy, with continued rising incomes and more Americans pulling themselves out of poverty.

The Census data shows that income gains in 2006 were substantial and widespread across all income categories. And the largest percentage income gains occurred for people in the bottom 20 percent of incomes.

The data also shows that poverty levels improved significantly, with nearly half a million fewer people living below the poverty line in 2006 than in 2005. Moreover, the poverty rate in 2006 was lower than all but one year in the 1980s and 1990s.

The Census data also shows that challenges remain in reducing the number of uninsured Americans. Containing costs and

making health insurance more affordable is the best way to reverse this long-term trend. I have put forth a reform proposal that would fairly distribute the tax advantages to purchasing health insurance, encouraging more workers to purchase their own health insurance.

What American workers do not need right now are tax increases to fuel excess spending by the Congress. I encourage Democratic leaders in Congress to resist their urge to increase taxes on Americans and to live within the budget limits I've proposed. It's vital that we do not undermine an economy that has created more than 8.2 million new jobs over the past 4 years and is improving standards of living for so many American families.

NOTE: The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language version of this statement.

Remarks Following a Dinner With Elected Officials and Community Leaders in New Orleans, Louisiana
August 28, 2007

The President. Ms. Chase, thank you for having us here. Laura and I are thrilled to be here with the Governor and the mayor and the Senator, the Congressman, members of my Cabinet, distinguished leaders in this community, and quiet heroes who have helped bring optimism and hope to New Orleans.

We've got social entrepreneurs in our midst, artists in our midst, all of whom have dedicated their lives to the renewal of New Orleans. And we're so honored to be in this restaurant. I know you would want me to say that the food here is about as good as any place here in New Orleans. [*Laughter*] And I will say it. [*Laughter*]

Reverend Fred Luter, Jr. It is that good.

The President. It is good. And we're so honored that you gave us a chance to come to the renovated restaurant. I know you're opening in a couple of weeks.

Leah Chase. In a couple of weeks, yes.

The President. Well, we're thrilled that you would allow us to come and taste your beautiful food in this spectacular room. We love your art, but more importantly, we love

your spirit. You're one of the leaders here in this community.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:55 p.m. at Dooky Chase's Restaurant. In his remarks, he referred to Leah Chase, owner, Dooky Chase's Restaurant; Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco, Senator Mary L. Landrieu, and Representative William J. Jefferson of Louisiana; Mayor C. Ray Nagin of New Orleans, LA; and Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Alphonso R. Jackson. Also participating in the dinner were Donald E. Powell, Federal Coordinator, Office of Gulf Coast Rebuilding; Raymond S. "Coach" Blanco, husband of Gov. Blanco; Tommy Andrade, owner, Blanca, LLC; John Besh, executive chef, Restaurant August and Besh Steakhouse at Harrah's Casino; Dr. Dale Betterton, comanager, Operation Blessing Medical Clinic; Julia Bland, executive director, Louisiana Children's Museum; Drew Brees, quarterback, New Orleans Saints; Joseph C. Canizaro, chairman and chief executive officer, Columbus Properties; Daryn Dodson, IDEAcopps fellow, Idea Village; Norman C. Francis, chairman, and Kim M. Boyle, member, Louisiana Recovery Authority; Lt. Gen. Russel L. Honore, USA, commanding general, First United States Army; Jared Kahan, volunteer, AmeriCorps; Jay Lapeyre, chairman, Business Council of New Orleans; Agustin "Augie" Lopez, owner, Smilie's Restaurant; Rev. Fred Luter, Jr., pastor, Franklin Street Baptist Church; musician Irvin Mayfield; Father Nguyen The Vien, pastor, Mary Queen of Vietnam Church; and Becky Zaheri, president and founder, Katrina Krewe.

Memorandum on Assignment of Function Concerning Assistance to Afghanistan

August 27, 2007

Presidential Determination No. 2007-29

Memorandum for the Secretary of State, the Director of National Drug Control Policy, and the Director of National Intelligence

Subject: Assignment of Function Concerning Assistance to Afghanistan

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and laws of the United States, including section 301 of title 3, United States Code, the function of the President under the heading "Economic Support

Fund” in the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2006 (Public Law 109–102)(the “Act”), as carried forward by the Revised Continuing Appropriations Resolution, 2007 (Public Law 110–5), that relates to waiver of a provision is assigned to the Secretary of State. The Director of National Drug Control Policy and the Director of National Intelligence shall, consistent with applicable law, provide the Secretary of State with such information as may be necessary to assist the Secretary in the performance of such function.

Reference in this memorandum to the provision in the Act shall be deemed to include references to any provision of law that is the same or substantially the same as such provision.

The Secretary of State is authorized and directed to publish this memorandum in the *Federal Register*.

George W. Bush

NOTE: This memorandum was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 29.

Proclamation 8169—Minority Enterprise Development Week, 2007 *August 28, 2007*

*By the President of the United States
of America*

A Proclamation

Minority Enterprise Development Week is a chance to highlight the accomplishments of minority business owners and underscore our commitment to strengthening minority businesses and helping these entrepreneurs succeed.

Minority business owners have made our Nation stronger. Our thriving and resilient economy is the envy of the world, and minority business owners are expanding opportunities for their fellow Americans.

More than 8 million jobs have been created in our country since August 2003, and minority businesses have contributed to this progress. Our economy has experienced more than 5 years of uninterrupted growth, and the unemployment rate remains low. My

Administration has worked with the Congress to deliver needed tax relief, and this has left more money in the hands of minority business owners to reinvest in their employees, their communities, and our country’s robust economy. By adopting sound policies that help our businesses continue to grow and expand, we are ensuring that America remains the land of the entrepreneur.

Our Nation has the most innovative, industrious, and talented people on Earth and when we unleash their entrepreneurial spirit, there is no limit to what the American people can achieve. During Minority Enterprise Development Week, and throughout the year, we recognize the vital contributions of minority business owners. These dedicated individuals are helping create a more hopeful society for themselves and their families. We will continue to strive for a society where personal effort is rewarded and where the American dream is within the reach of all our citizens.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim September 9 through September 15, 2007, as Minority Enterprise Development Week. I call upon all Americans to celebrate this week with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities to recognize the many contributions of our Nation’s minority enterprises.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-eighth day of August, in the year of our Lord two thousand seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-second.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 9:03 a.m., August 30, 2007]

NOTE: This proclamation was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 29, and it was published in the *Federal Register* on August 31.

Remarks on Hurricane Katrina Recovery Efforts in New Orleans

August 29, 2007

The President. Madam Principal, thank you for having us.

Principal Doris Hicks. You're quite welcome. It's our pleasure.

The President. Laura and I are honored to be here. During the moment of reflection, it is a time to ask for the Almighty's blessings on those who suffered, those who lost a loved one, and remember that there's always a more blessed day in the future. And that's what we're here to celebrate, a more blessed day. And there's no better place to do so than in a place of hope, and that's a school. And so we're honored that you would welcome us. We love being with your teachers and your students. Thanks for being here.

Governor, thanks for coming. Governor Kathleen Blanco is an educational reformer. She has done what leaders are supposed to do, and when she sees a problem, address them head on and pass law and budget necessary to achieve educational excellence. And you've done so, Governor. I congratulate you for your leadership.

I'm proud to be with the Congressman. Jeff, thanks for coming. You care deeply about the students of this district, and we're glad you're here.

I do want to thank Don Powell for joining us. Don is the recovery man who represents the White House and the administration here in Washington—from—in Louisiana from Washington. And I thank you for your service.

I appreciate the State education superintendent, Pastorek. Superintendent, thanks for coming. He's got a vision of excellence for the schools in New Orleans and for Louisiana. He shared that vision with us earlier.

I appreciate Paul Vallas, superintendent here in New Orleans, for his willingness to take on this challenge. He doesn't view it as a problem; he views it as an opportunity. I first met Paul in Chicago, where he was an advocate then like he is today of high expectations and strong accountability to make sure every child learns.

I appreciate Hilda Young; Sister Finnerty—she's the superintendent of the

Catholic school system here. I thank all the teachers, students, and parents who've joined us.

Hurricane Katrina broke through the levees; it broke a lot of hearts; it destroyed buildings. But it didn't affect the spirit of a lot of citizens in this community. This spirit can be best reflected when you think about a principal who refused to allow a school to be destroyed by the flood and worked hard to not only rebuild the building but keep the spirit alive. Or it can be reflected in the fact that teachers commute. We met a seventh grade teacher today who commutes 30 miles every day to be able to impart knowledge and to share wisdom with students who will be leading New Orleans in the future.

And so it's—my attitude is this: New Orleans, better days are ahead. It's sometimes hard for people to see progress when you live in a community all the time. Laura and I get to come—we don't live here; we come on occasion. And it's easy to think about what it was like when we first came here after the hurricane and what it's like today. And this town is coming back. This town is better today than it was yesterday, and it's going to be better tomorrow than it was today. And there's no better place to find that out than in the school system.

First, I do want to thank our fellow citizens for their generosity when it comes to helping New Orleans and the gulf coast rebuild. The citizens of this country thus far have paid out \$114 billion in tax revenues—their money—to help the folks down here. And I appreciate the Governor. Last night we went to—we had a nice dinner here in New Orleans—by the way, I have yet to recover. [*Laughter*] Dooky Chase's—if you want to eat a lot of good food, go there. But during that dinner, the Governor expressed her appreciation to the taxpayers of America. In other words, the taxpayers and people from all around the country have got to understand, the people of this part of the world really do appreciate the fact that the American citizens are supportive of the recovery effort.

Of the 114 billion spent so far and resources allocated so far, about 80 percent of the funds have been disbursed or available. And, of course, Don and I will try to work through the bureaucracy in Washington, just

like folks down here are trying to work through the bureaucracy, to make sure that there are adequate plans for the money. And so we're working through this kind of collaborative effort of Federal, State, and local folks working together to make sure that taxpayers' money is spent wisely on priorities.

But there's been a commitment—and a strong commitment. A lot of people down here probably wondered whether or not those of us in the Federal Government not from Louisiana would pay attention to Louisiana or Mississippi. In other words, it's one thing to come and give a speech in Jackson Square; it's another thing to keep paying attention to whether or not progress is being made. And I hope people understand we do. We're still paying attention. We understand.

One of Don Powell's jobs is to make sure that the Federal Government understands the hurdles that remain for recovery. One hurdle was the levee system. We fully understand that New Orleans can't be rebuilt until there's confidence in the levees. It's one thing to plan; it's another thing to convince people that the levees will work. And there's been a lot of effort by the Army Corps of Engineers. A matter of fact, Don Powell announced the other day that we're going to complete work to improve storm and flood protection infrastructure to a 100-year protection level by 2011. And that's a commitment, and it's an important commitment to make.

We're also going to fund \$1.3 billion network of interior drainage projects to ensure the area has better hurricane protection. In other words, there's Federal responsibilities. The levee system is the Federal responsibility, and we'll meet our responsibility. And there's a—obviously, we want to work together with the State and local governments as well. Obviously, it's a collaborative effort.

One of the things that Kathleen and I have been working on a long time is wetlands restoration in order to provide more protection for the folks down here. We got a good bill out of the Congress, and there's an opportunity now for Louisiana to have the cash funds necessary to begin a serious and substantive wetlands restoration program.

I appreciate the fact that Al Gonzales was down yesterday, talking about how the Fed-

eral Government can help on local law enforcement matters. I firmly believe local law enforcement is just that—local. It requires a commitment by the local folks to hold people to account for crime. But the Federal Government can help. And so Al was down yesterday, announcing and opening a family justice center to help the victims of domestic violence. The VA is going to build a medical center in downtown New Orleans as part of the Federal commitment to helping people here recover.

And so I come telling the folks in this part of the world that we still understand there's problems and we're still engaged. And Don will continue to make sure that we listen and respond when possible.

But let me talk about the school system. There is nothing more hopeful than a good school system. And I firmly believe that excellence in education is going to be the leading edge of change for New Orleans. Margaret Spellings, who is the Secretary of Education, understands this concept. The Government has provided Louisiana with more than \$700 million in emergency education funds to help not only the public school system but also the parochial school system. And that's money well spent. It's money spent on construction; it's money spent on creating incentives for teachers to return; it's money incentive to make sure children who went to other school districts—those school districts got reimbursed. It was good money spent because education needs to be the number-one priority of the State, just like Kathleen Blanco has made that the priority.

New Orleans is about to open 80 schools—nearly 80 schools this fall. That's a remarkable achievement—nearly half of which happen to be charter schools. I believe in freedom to manage and accountability to make sure everybody learns. And that's the essence of the charter school movement: freedom to manage, but accountability to make sure no child gets left behind.

And that's the spirit of the superintendent—both superintendents here. They believe in high expectations and measuring. It's what I call challenging the soft bigotry of low expectations. If you don't believe that somebody can learn, you'll set low expectations. If you believe every child can learn,

you'll raise the expectations, and then you'll insist upon measurement to make sure that each child is tracked, that we disaggregate results. That's a fancy word for making sure that we understand whether or not each school is meeting certain standards and then help for those that aren't, changes for those that aren't, and praise for those that are. And we're at MLK, and we're here to heap praise.

Mrs. Hicks. Thank you. I agree.

The President. This is the first public school to open in the Lower Ninth Ward. It is a tribute to volunteers, concerned parents, and citizens who care about education. It is a tribute to the fact that there's teachers who taught in makeshift classrooms during renovations. In other words, they care about the buildings, but they care more about education and were willing to teach no matter what the circumstances may be. And it's a tribute to a principal who had a clear vision.

Mrs. Hicks. Thank you.

The President. And so we're here to herald excellence and to thank the good folks in this community for supporting this school, with the understanding that this school is one of the great beacons for hope.

I want to thank the educational entrepreneurs who've joined us, those who are in the process of helping find new teachers. Teachers—there was a great concern, obviously, when the schools were reopening as to whether or not there would be enough teachers. And people responded. People responded to the call to help provide, at a grassroots level, the support necessary to encourage people to teach. TeachNOLA is such an example. If you're interested in being a teacher, from around the country, get on the Internet on teachNOLA and you'll find opportunities to come here to New Orleans to teach. We've got somebody from Washington who came down to help rally support for the school system. Teach For America is active in this community.

The charter school system, by the way, spawns all kinds of different opportunities for people to be involved with schools. I think of KIPP McDonogh 15 School. It's a high standard school. It is a school that says, "If there are rules that prevent us from teaching, we'll try to figure out how to get around

them, because what matters more than anything is teaching a child."

I was impressed that when they got into the school system there, when they first got going in this particular school, they extended the school day with class every other Saturday. They said, "What does it take to catch up? What do we need to do to meet standards?" And the principal—the former principal put it this way: "It took a hurricane to speed up and really jump-start the reform efforts in New Orleans." In other words, the hurricane was disastrous for many reasons, but it also gave a great opportunity for a new way forward, seized by the Governor and the superintendents and the principals, by the way.

Laura and I care a lot about the libraries. That's why we're dedicating books. We're proud to be a part of the rebuilding of this library. Laura has got a foundation and has established the Gulf Coast Library Recovery Initiative, all aiming to make sure that these libraries are stocked with books. You ought to apply to her foundation, by the way. [Laughter] I think you'll have a good opportunity. [Laughter]

The First Lady. Absolutely.

Mrs. Hicks. I know.

The President. I'll try to work it for you.

Mrs. Hicks. Good. [Laughter]

The President. I'll never forget, one time when I was Governor of Texas, a woman looked at me, and she said, "Reading is the new civil right." It had a profound impact on the policies that we have pursued since I've been in public office and Laura has pursued as a lifelong reader. And that person was right. We've got to start making sure those youngsters can read at grade level and stay reading at grade level. No better way to send the message that that is a commitment, by making sure the libraries are stocked.

I want to share a story with you about a woman named Rebecca Jeanfreau who's here. Where are you, Rebecca? There you go; thanks for coming. She was a Boston architect. She studied to become an architect and was in a firm. But she is from New Orleans. And she started thinking about the community she loved. And so she said, "I needed to act, and I'm ready to act." And she came

back to be a teacher. She left a promising career as a architect to come back to a community that is dear to her heart.

It's that spirit, by the way, that is going to allow me to predict with certainty, New Orleans' better days are ahead for the New Orleans people. I mean, this is a—and there are stories like Rebecca all over this community, people who have heard a call to come back and help. No better way to help, by the way, than to teach.

But there are all kinds of different ways people can help the people of New Orleans and the gulf coast recover. You can contribute to the NGOs or the local organizations that are still helping heal hearts. You can help with sending books to schools. You can get on web sites to determine where the needs are. And if you're a citizen of this country who cares about making sure this part of the region fully recovers, please participate. Please find a way to help and continue to do so.

So, Governor, I'm honored you're here. Laura and I are thrilled to be in this school. We're really pleased that MLK School has given us an opportunity to herald excellence. We care deeply about the folks in this part of the world. We ask for God's blessings on the families who still hurt and suffer. And we thank God for the recovery efforts that thus far have taken place.

Thank you for your time.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:40 a.m. at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School for Science and Technology. In his remarks, he referred to Representative William J. Jefferson of Louisiana; Hilda Young, president, Friends of King Board; Eric Johnson, seventh grade math teacher, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School for Science and Technology; and Gary Robichaux, former principal, KIPP McDonogh 15 School for the Creative Arts.

Remarks Following a Visit With New Homeowners in New Orleans

August 29, 2007

The President. We have just—Laura and I have just been given a tour by the Whites in their new home. And they're going to be moving into this home this weekend maybe.

Gen White. Yes. This weekend.

The President. There's nothing more hopeful than to be with somebody who says, "Welcome to my home," particularly given the fact that these mixed-use housing projects have replaced old-style, low-income housing projects that, frankly, didn't work. In other words, the storm came, created a lot of heartbreak and heartache, but people took a different look at how best to help people in their homes.

And we're in this beautiful project. This is a stunning project. So I'm with homeowners-to-be, renters. Here's a homeowner-to-be right here. Right across the street, as a matter of fact, isn't that right? People are going to be able to say, "This is my home."

This is really a remarkable project. For people in New Orleans who remember what this site was like compared to what it is today, they've got to be full of hope. And so I appreciate the builders. I appreciate Alphonso Jackson in Housing and Urban Development, the group that have helped get this project started. But most of all, I appreciate the homeowners-to-be, people who are working hard to be able to say, "This is my home." And we really appreciate you giving us a chance to come by.

Ms. White. Thank you.

The President. And we wish you all the very best in your new home. Congratulations to you.

Thank you all. Good job. Thank you. Good luck to you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:06 a.m. at the River Garden Housing Complex.

Remarks on Gulf Coast Reconstruction in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi

August 29, 2007

Thank you all for coming. This is the second anniversary of an event that changed a lot of people's lives here in southern Mississippi and up and down the coast. And Laura and I are honored to be with some of those who endured the storm and have dedicated their lives to rebuilding this part of the world.

We've been down here a lot, and as a result, I've gotten to know the local officials and have come to admire them as people dedicated to public service the way it ought to be. I, first of all, want to thank the Senator, Trent Lott, and his wife, Tricia, for joining us. Nobody cares more about the people of southern Mississippi than the Lotts. The people of southern Mississippi are fortunate to have not only a active Senator but a powerful Senator working on their behalf. And so, Senator, thank you for being here.

Gene Taylor cares a lot. Laura and I are proud to be here with Congressman Taylor. Gene was raised here. The Taylors' daughter was married right there recently. This is where he told me he was baptized, married, and if you're compassionate enough, will be buried. [*Laughter*] In other words, this is home. And when you're talking about a man's home, you hear a sense of passion in his voice. The Congressman has worked hard to make sure the people down here are well represented, and he's doing a fine job for the people of southern Mississippi. Congressman, thank you for being here.

The Governor of Mississippi has shown his true mettle and his value to the people of Mississippi. When crisis hit, he was calm. When the crisis began to abate a little bit, he planned. And he's been good for the people down here. He's taken a problem on, and he's coordinated it and managed in a way that you'd expect your chief executive to do. And so, Governor, I want to congratulate you on a job well done. I appreciate the First Lady being here as well. Thanks for working hard for the people down here.

Joining us are members of—a member of my Cabinet, Alphonso Jackson, Housing and Urban Development man. Don Powell is here. He is the Federal Coordinator of the Office of Gulf Coast Rebuilding. That really means that he is the President's eyes and ears on the ground. And while we recognize that there are bureaucracies that we have to deal with in order to make sure the taxpayers' money is spent wisely, sometimes the bureaucracies get in the way of common sense. And one of Don's jobs is to help spot those obstacles to progress and work with the local folks to try to clear them out of the way.

There's still obstacles, and there's still work to be done. But there's been a lot of progress made, and that's what people have got to understand. And I have come to this site, it's what we call ground zero—this is where the worst of the worst of the storm hit—to be able to show the American people that through their generosity, this infrastructure has been rebuilt.

Before I get there, I do want to thank Phil Bryant, the State auditor, for joining us. Appreciate you coming, Phil. And then I want to pay tribute to the local folks that I mentioned.

First of all, Eddie Favre—he's the mayor of the city of Bay St. Louis. Eddie's—for those of you who may be paying attention to this from around the country, he's the man who—would be known as the man who wears short pants. [*Laughter*] Eddie is—he's a colorful character, but he also is a smart man who has dedicated more in his life than he ever dreamed to helping rebuild a city he loves.

Tommy Longo—he's from Waveland. I've always viewed Waveland as a benchmark to determine whether or not this recovery is more than just shallow. In other words, I'll never forget seeing Waveland as we choppered over Waveland. It was, like, nothing; it was gone, completely destroyed. And so when I talk to Tommy—I really view Tommy as a barometer, and if Tommy is optimistic, I'm going to be optimistic; if Tommy says there is progress, I'm going to say, thanks. And Tommy is okay. [*Laughter*] I wouldn't call him the most optimistic guy on the face of the Earth, but given what he's been through and given what he has seen, it is remarkable that he's still willing to serve with optimism.

And so we've got a lot of work to do. These two mayors brought their problems to us—people are worried about insurance here. They're worried about bureaucracy. I'll tell you what they're really worried about; they're worried about the President and other folks in Washington, other than the Mississippi officials, are going to forget what took place down here. And so one of the reasons that Laura and I have come back is to remind people that we haven't forgotten and won't.

Somebody who sometimes is worried about getting forgotten is the county supervisor, Rocky Pullman. Now, Rocky—I guess we've probably met a dozen times, haven't we, Rock? And Rocks reminds me of the county commissioners from the State I've come from. County commissioners are always worried that the city folks are going to get the attention, but the rural folks will be ignored. Not in this case. Rocky has represented the people of Hancock County well, and we spent a lot of time talking to Rocky about debris and trees and other issues still facing the people down here.

Ground zero got hit really hard. I mean, it's the place where the storm did its most damage. And while there is better recovery down the coast, people here are still trying to crawl out from underneath the extensive damage. It's really one of the messages I heard. And we're proud that Pascagoula is doing better and Biloxi is doing better. That's good. It's good for the State, and we're thrilled that that's happening. But the folks here had a special, extra problems to deal with, and I heard you loud and clear. And I want to thank you for sharing that with me.

The American people have written a check—written checks for \$114 billion to help the people on the coast. And so one thing I do want the American people to know is how grateful the people of this part of the country are for their generosity. We felt we had an obligation to help, and we've helped. Now, of that 114 billion, about 80 percent has been obligated. Mississippi has taken the obligated money and is spending it wisely. There's still 20 percent of the authorized that hasn't been shipped out yet, so there's more money coming. And there's—obviously, we've got some more issues that we're trying to work through in time.

One area where there's been great State-Federal cooperation and local cooperation is the rebuilding of this Bay St. Louis Bridge. Now, remember when we first choppered over here, Governor; the bridge was—there might have been a few pylons showing. You could see the planks underwater of that bridge. And this is a major connector for the people in this part of the world. This is an economic lifeline. So the Federal Government said, we have an obligation to repair

infrastructure. I think the Congressman told me we've written a little more than \$260 million worth of checks to help get this bridge built, but more importantly, this bridge was built in record time because of the close cooperation between the State and the Federal Government and the local folks. And it's a beautiful looking bridge, and it's working.

There's another bridge in the foreground here, and that's a private sector bridge. That's the railroad bridge that's up and running. The private sector is responding here in southern Mississippi. The State of Mississippi—it's interesting—I want to tell our fellow citizens about what they have done here in 2 years' period. One, they've helped move 31,000 families out of temporary housing into permanent homes. I don't think we would have been that optimistic 2 years ago when we were recovering from the storms, that it would be possible to make those kind of moves that quickly.

This is a State that opened virtually every public school that was damaged in the storm, a State that understands that education is part of the—an important part of the recovery effort. There's a billion dollars have gone out to help homeowners with repairs and rebuilding. The State is active in trying to help the citizens regain their footing. Tax revenues are up.

Now, that's positive, but that doesn't mean there's not more work to be done and more efforts made to help ground zero recover. The interesting thing about the folks who live in this part of the world, they may have lost their building, but they never lost their soul or their spirit. I think the Senator called them—resilience is what he'd like to define people. I call them optimistic about life.

And one such person is Kay Gough, who is with us today. Kay is somewhere—there she is, right there. Here's an interesting story. First of all, she's a—she loves Bay St. Louis. She recognizes the uniqueness of the community. She's a lifelong reader. She was concerned about what happened to her community. So what did she do? She opened a bookstore on Main Street, Bay St. Louis. First business up, right? One of the first, yes. And it's an interesting example of the entrepreneurial spirit and a—combined with a civic duty. She said there's still a lot of work that

needs to be done to get people back in these communities so that they can be buying her books. She said, "We want people to know that we want to be a part of the recovery, and we want to be a part of the community."

It's that community spirit that has been very impressive to me and Laura. It's that can-do attitude. It's the attitude that said, "Okay, a storm came. We understand it; we don't like it; but we're going to deal with it." That's the Mississippi spirit.

And so we're glad to be back. We're glad to be back in a part of our country that is going to be better than it was before. It's—there's still work. We understand that. There's work in Louisiana to be done; there's work in Mississippi to be done. But the progress that has been made really speaks to the coordination of Government effort, but it really speaks to the great spirit of the people who live down here.

May God bless them, and may God continue to bless our country. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:23 p.m. at Our Lady of the Gulf Parish Community Center. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Haley Barbour of Mississippi and his wife, Marsha.

Statement on the 15th Anniversary of the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program

August 29, 2007

Today is the 15th anniversary of the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) Program, established in 1992 under the leadership of President George H.W. Bush and Senators Richard Lugar and Sam Nunn. CTR programs are a critical tool used to address one of the gravest threats we face—the danger that terrorists and proliferators could gain access to weapons or materials of mass destruction.

Under the CTR Program, thousands of nuclear warheads have been deactivated, and thousands of delivery systems—including missiles, strategic bombers, and strategic ballistic nuclear submarines—have been eliminated. Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine are free of nuclear weapons and strategic delivery systems. The CTR Program is working to complete security upgrades to Russian nu-

clear warhead storage sites under the Bratislava Nuclear Security Cooperation Initiative announced by President Putin and me in 2005. To date, over 75 percent of the Russian warhead sites and 160 buildings containing hundreds of metric tons of weapons-usable nuclear material have been secured. Work is underway at the balance of the warhead and material sites, to be completed on an accelerated basis by the end of 2008 under the Bratislava Initiative.

We have also achieved nearly 75 percent completion toward our goal of shutting down two of the last three remaining Russian weapons-grade plutonium production reactors by the end of 2008 and nearly one-third completion toward shutting down the last reactor by the end of 2010, thus eliminating approximately 1.2 metric tons of weapons-grade plutonium per year. Through the CTR Program, several large-scale Soviet biological and chemical production facilities have been safely dismantled in Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Georgia.

By working to secure, eliminate, and account for weapons and materials of mass destruction, the CTR Program supports the National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction and remains the cornerstone for U.S. funding of the G-8 Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction.

Another important accomplishment of CTR is the redirection of thousands of former weapons scientists in the former Soviet Union, Libya, and Iraq into commercial or other nonmilitary pursuits. In addition, the CTR Program has helped Albania destroy all of its chemical weapons.

As the threat continues to evolve elsewhere, U.S. CTR efforts are expanding to include the work of securing dangerous biological pathogens, rapidly detecting disease outbreaks, and improving export controls and border security to stop the movement of materials of mass destruction worldwide.

NOTE: The statement referred to President Vladimir Putin of Russia.

Statement on the Situation in Burma*August 30, 2007*

I strongly condemn the ongoing actions of the Burmese regime in arresting, harassing, and assaulting prodemocracy activists for organizing or participating in peaceful demonstrations. These activists were voicing concerns about recent dramatic increases in the price of fuel, and their concerns should be listened to by the regime rather than silenced through force.

The Burmese regime should heed the international calls to release these activists immediately and stop its intimidation of those Burmese citizens who are promoting democracy and human rights. I also call on the regime to release all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and to lift restrictions on humanitarian organizations that seek to help the people of Burma.

Proclamation 8170—National Preparedness Month, 2007*August 30, 2007*

*By the President of the United States
of America*

A Proclamation

National Preparedness Month is an opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of emergency preparedness and to encourage all Americans to better prepare their homes and communities for emergencies.

Protecting America's homeland and citizens is the shared responsibility of the entire Nation. Individuals can prepare themselves and their families for emergencies by taking simple steps such as organizing an emergency supply kit, making a personal preparedness plan, becoming informed about different threats, and getting involved in preparing their community. These activities create a culture of preparedness and can help save lives.

My Administration continues to improve our Nation's ability to prepare for emergencies. The Department of Homeland Security is working with other Federal, State, and local government organizations, as well as the private sector, to prevent, respond to,

and recover from all types of emergencies. Together, Americans can significantly enhance the level of national preparedness to further safeguard our communities and secure our homeland.

This month is also an opportunity to pay tribute to America's first responders who put themselves at risk for the safety of their fellow citizens. These brave police officers, firefighters, and emergency service personnel exemplify the compassion and commitment that help strengthen our country. We will be forever grateful for their service and sacrifice.

During National Preparedness Month, I encourage all Americans to get involved in their community's preparedness efforts. Citizens may visit ready.gov and citizencorps.gov to learn more about emergency preparedness and ways to take action.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim September 2007 as National Preparedness Month. I call upon the people of the United States to recognize the importance of preparing for potential emergencies and to observe this month by participating in appropriate events, activities, and preparedness programs.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this thirtieth day of August, in the year of our Lord two thousand seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-second.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., September 4, 2007]

NOTE: This proclamation will be published in the *Federal Register* on September 5.

Interview With Foreign Print Media*August 30, 2007*

The President. So, like, what are the rules?

National Security Council Senior Director for Asian Affairs Dennis Wilder. On the record.

The President. I'm talking about for these people back here.

National Security Council Press Secretary Gordon Johndroe. It's all on the record. It's embargoed until these fine people have a chance to run their stories.

The President. Good. Thanks. I'm looking forward to my trip. This is the seventh APEC summit that I've been to. I find them to be important for the United States in the following ways.

One, it's an opportunity to stress the importance that we place upon basic values, basic value of liberty, basic value of open markets in order to enhance prosperity. It's a chance to remind people that we are linked together. It's an interesting setting, when you have people from different cultures, different languages come together for a common purpose. I think that's important.

It's also a chance for me to remind our country how important it is to have constructive ties in Asia. Asia is a place where we've spilt a lot of blood in the past, and now it's a place of peace. Asia is a place where the United States was engaged militarily, and now we're engaged culturally and socially and economically in a way that is constructive for our peoples.

It will be an opportunity for—remind me that it's possible for enemies to be allies and for enemies to be friends. It's a lesson for a lot of us to think about when we think about the Middle East, that forms of government matter and hopeful societies yield peace.

I'm looking forward to the discussions about trade. The first priority for trade for me at the meeting will be on Doha. I'm a firm believer in free trade. I believe the Doha round is the best opportunity for us to accomplish a couple of objectives. One is to fight off protectionism and trade freely, and secondly is to help eliminate poverty. This will be an opportunity for the leaders of the APEC summit to express their desire to see the Doha round succeed. We'll take the lead in that, along with other nations.

There's also an opportunity for us to start talking about a free trade agreement of the Pacific region. And I'm looking forward to having that dialog, begin the dialog. It would just be kind of an interesting opportunity to have the dialog on this aspect of our strategic

partnership there and to move forward. We've got a lot of—we've got some free trade agreements with people, and that will be at the table. I'd like to see those free trade agreements become regionalized.

Opportunity for me to continue to talk about the struggle between radicalism and reasonableness, between extremism and people that want to live in peace. I happen to believe—I'm sure you've heard me say this—that we're in a major ideological struggle—a struggle we will win, by the way. But it's going to require resolve and dedication. And this will be an opportunity for me to remind our friends at the table that this is the call of our time and that we have an opportunity to write a hopeful chapter here in the beginning of the 21st century and to thank people around the table for understanding this is the call of the time, because there's been a lot of constructive engagement and good work, all aimed at protecting ourselves from short-term attack—in the short term from attack and recognizing that changing conditions of life in the long term will enable us to live in peace.

And finally, I'm looking forward to reminding people that I take the climate change issue seriously; that we recognize that there needs to be international—an international accord to get people at the table who are the major emitters to set a goal. Step one to solving a problem is to set the goal on what we ought to achieve. If you want somebody to be a part of the problem—a part of the solution, you need to let them be a part of defining what the goal ought to be. That's the strategy.

So many of the people at the APEC table are going to come to the major economy conference that—those of us who are emitters will be there, including China, which will be at the table. I don't want to single China out, but China has got a major role to play. Any agreement without China is not going to be an effective agreement. So my strategy has been to get China at the table. We will further the dialog. John Howard has got some very interesting ways to further the dialog in a constructive way, particularly talking about energy usage. So we'll be looking forward to his leadership on the issue. When I told him

I was looking forward to coming, we discussed this issue. He's concerned about greenhouse gases. And so he'll take the lead here at the conference, and the United States will play a constructive role.

Anyway, that's why I'm looking forward to going. We've got a big agenda. It's my second trip to Australia. I remind people that Australia—parts of Australia reminds me of Texas—[laughter]—and there's no higher compliment. [Laughter]

So, given that, Geoff, why don't you start off? We'll do two rounds, then I've got to go.

Asia-Pacific Region-U.S. Relations/North Korea/China

Q. Thanks, Mr. President. I think on behalf of all of us, I can say thank you very much for this opportunity today.

The President. Thanks.

Q. As you've just analyzed, Mr. President, obviously Iraq and the Middle East, the war on terror is an overarching policy issue for the Bush administration. Nonetheless, there has been a perception in the region that this has distracted Washington from engagement in Asia. There's been some criticism on that score. Some people are calling this the Pacific century. You're cutting short your trip to Sydney because of the Iraq issue. I'm just wondering, do you think that's warranted, that criticism, and do you see China, for instance, playing the role—the driver in the Pacific century, not the U.S.?

The President. No, it's interesting—first of all, this administration has got good bilateral relations with Japan, good bilateral relations with China, good bilateral relations with Korea. Our relationship with the ASEAN countries are as strong as America has ever been, and of course our ties with Australia are tight, really tight.

And the reason I say that is, is that this just doesn't happen without work. And I have worked hard to develop bilateral relations in such a way that we can achieve strategic objectives. I believe the relations with the United States and the Asian-Pacific region have never been better, and as a result, we're addressing problems and creating opportunities.

One problem, of course, is North Korea. When I came into office, the world was expecting the United States to solve the North Korea issue alone. To me—and the North Korean leader had basically not honored the bilateral agreement that had been struck, and therefore, felt like we needed to put this issue in a position in which others were speaking besides the United States—and have started the six-party talks. Five countries were convinced to come to the table on one side to convince the North Korean leader to give up his nuclear weapons ambitions. It's working. That wouldn't have happened without engagement and good, solid relations.

Another issue, obviously, is our bilateral relations with China. It's the same—you're in a little different position in that you've got a nice trade surplus with China. We've got a trade deficit with China. And it's important for us to have a—given the complexity of our relationship, that we've got a strategic relationship that allows for engagement and for us to help deal with a major trade deficit, for example, and/or product safety or a SARS outbreak. Secretary Paulson—I empowered Secretary Paulson to develop this special working relationship with China. And it requires a lot of engagement. It requires engagement at the top, with President Hu Jintao, who I respect, as well as people in my Cabinet. So there's a lot of interchange. For those who argue that, they really haven't—frankly haven't followed how engaged we have been.

Is China an issue for the world? Absolutely. But I don't view it as a negative issue; I view it as an opportunity to work with a—one of the really significantly growing economies in the world.

Here's the way I view it: First, I view that a growing middle class in China is good for U.S. exporters. It provides opportunity. And it's—by the way, it's not only good for U.S. exports; it's good for Australian exporters, and it's good for Japanese exporters, and it's good for Singaporean, Malaysian. Anybody who is making a product somebody wants, it's just a good opportunity.

And so as a part of our engagement with China, we have worked with Hu Jintao to convince him to help convert his economy

from one of savers to one of consumers, which means—and, by the way, that takes a lot of effort and work to get in a position where you can even make those kind of constructive suggestions—which means the development of a pension system or health care, so that people don't feel like they have to hoard their money to save for a rainy day, but in fact there's some kind of safety net that is predictable, which then would convert a Chinese person who is beginning to realize better income into a consumer. And then all of a sudden, you've got consumers, which provide opportunity.

Now, Hu Jintao actually gave these remarks at the White House—along these lines—at the East Room there. It took a lot of trust and work to get—to enable him to make that statement, but that's the kind of statement which people around the region ought to say, thankfully—I'm thankful that he was able to say that, because it takes what some view as a problem and converts it into a great opportunity for all of us to grow our respective economies.

Trade

Q. Huge economic opportunity—you see China as the big grower of the economy in the Asia Pacific?

The President. No, I see the United States as the big driver for trade. We're a significant economy. At APEC people ought to be wondering whether or not George Bush is going to keep taxes low to make sure our economy continues to grow, because we're a significant trading partner. I view China as an opportunity.

I think the United States is going to drive a lot of the trade. That's why we conducted—now, having said that, I think China will provide opportunity for Australian producers, but we also provide the same opportunity. I don't view it as a zero-sum game. Let me put it to you that way. I view it as an—I view—all of us contribute, so long as the world doesn't slip into protectionism. And part of the reason one goes to APEC is to promote trade and opportunity.

Tia.

China-U.S. Relations/War on Terror

Q. Just following up about China. Do you consider actually China is a friend or an enemy? And how do you plan to win the hearts and win the markets in the world, including in Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia?

The President. Well, I think, first of all, we have a complex relationship with China. It is one that—where it is growing; it's changing. The United States strongly supports markets. China is a market that's developing. On the other hand, we also support open societies, transparency, where people are allowed to express themselves in a free society. I believe in freedom of religion. I believe in basic freedoms.

So our relationship with China is, on the one hand, we welcome trading opportunities. We want there to be free trade and fair trade; we want the currency to float. These are complex issues. And what makes the relationship even more complex is, at the same time, we believe in human rights and human dignity. And we worked with the Chinese leadership to promote human rights and human dignity.

So it's not—it's hard to define the relationship in kind of a simple, one-sentence structure. And so “complex,” is probably the best way to say, but positive. As I told you, I view China as a positive opportunity. And from a personal perspective, have got warm and cordial relationships with President Hu Jintao. I like him; I like to talk to him. He's a smart man. We can share issues together. I can say, “What are your biggest problems?” And he can say to me, “What are your problems?” In other words, we've got a personal relationship.

And that's the way I try to do with all leaders because the best diplomacy is when you can sit down with somebody one on one and speak candidly about issues and problems. We're problem-solvers. See, that's what leaders do. You see problems, and you anticipate problems and work together to accomplish something. And therefore, there has to be a personal relationship.

I've also got a very good relationship with your leader. And so bilateral relations—first of all, in the Muslim world, it's very important for people to understand that the war

on terror is not a war against Muslims; it's a war against murderers. I don't believe religious people, truly religious people kill the innocent. At least that's not the religion I believe in. And therefore, it's important for leaders and countries to work together to prevent the murder of the innocent and, at the same time, make sure that we respect—America, in my case, respects religion, values the right for people to worship, and, in the case of Islam, values Islam as an important part of the international scene in the world we live in.

Otsuka.

North Korea/Abduction of Japanese Citizens

Q. Thank you very much, sir.

The President. How are you?

Q. Good.

The President. Have we met before?

Q. No, first time.

The President. Yes, well, I'm better for it. [Laughter]

Q. I have a question on North Korea.

The President. North Korea, sure.

Q. Is it possible that North Korea will give up nuclear weapons program by the end of your term? And to help achieve it, are you ready to remove North Korea from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list, even without the resolution of Japanese abductee issue?

The President. Yes, thank you. As to the first part of your question, I certainly hope that North Korea honors its agreements. They—in September of 2006, they made a substantial agreement to disclose and dismantle all aspects of a nuclear weapons program. Is that right, September 6th?

National Security Adviser Stephen J. Hadley. 2005.

The President. Yes, 2005, excuse me. And here we are in 2007, nearly 2 years later, where we're still reminding them of that agreement. On the other hand, a lot has happened in the last couple of months that would lead me to believe that we're on—we're making progress. And we will continue to push toward the full disclosure and dismantlement.

Secondly, we have—different aspects of our relationship are on the table, but it's per-

formance based. In other words, we expect people to honor their agreements.

Finally, as I assured Prime Minister Abe, that we're not going to forget the abductee issue. He and the Japanese people are very concerned that once certain aspects of the agreement are achieved, that we will forget the fact that Japanese citizens have been abducted.

Well, let me tell you something, Otsuka—Ryuichi.

Q. Ryuichi.

The President. Ryuichi. I'll never forget the meeting I had with the mother—it's very important for your readers to know that that had a deep impression on me—the mother whose daughter was abducted by North Koreans. I can't imagine what that would mean. I guess I can imagine what it would mean; I just can't understand, fully understand the pain that she felt—still feels. And I'll never forget her coming to the Oval Office with the picture of that little girl, picture of her daughter who got abducted. She sat right there in the Oval Office. And my point to you is, is that I'm not going to forget the mother or forget the fact.

And so we'll work with the—continue to work with the Japanese to make it clear to the North Koreans that we also expect there to be resolution to this issue. In other words, I understand, as well as I possibly can, the emotion that people attach to this issue.

Salmy.

Organization of Islamic Conference/War on Terror

Q. Yes, sir. Mr. President.

The President. By the way, happy 50th.

Q. Thank you, sir.

The President. I remember when I turned 50; I felt old. [Laughter] But now that I'm over 60, it's not that old.

Q. Not that bad.

The President. No, it really isn't. You're not even close. You wouldn't even know.

Q. You look very young, sir.

The President. You are young. Oh, I look young? [Laughter] Good. I'm feeling pretty young, thanks. It's all in your mind.

Q. Sir, your administration has indicated interest to appoint a special envoy to the Organization of Islamic Conference, or the

OIC. Have you identified the person? And what will he or she do to bridge relations with the Islamic countries in the Muslim world, in light of the war in Iraq and in light of the detention of extremists from Muslim countries?

The President. First of all, we have not identified the person yet. We're working toward that end. As a matter of fact, I spoke to the Secretary of State about this this morning, coincidentally enough. And she's coming in, I think, tomorrow. Anyway, we're working the issue.

Secondly, the reason why I suggested—or announced that we're going to do this is because I am concerned about the perceptions in the Muslim world that the United States views the war on terror as a war against a particular religion. And I just explained to you that this is a war of extremists and radicals, ideologues driven by a vision that is not—that hijacks religion in order to justify their position. And any chance we have to dispel false notion and to reinforce the realities is helpful to the United States and, frankly, others as well. And so that's the reason to name the envoy.

It also is a clear signal that we respect nations and that we treat the Islamic world seriously. And you can do that all different kinds of ways. It's just another statement. It's another moment for people to see the seriousness of intent. In terms of—murder is murder, and murder to achieve political objectives is—needs to be stopped. People murdered Americans to achieve a political objective. There's a debate in our country whether that's true or not. I've made up my mind. I believe it's absolutely fundamentally true because I'm listening to what the enemy says, the enemy of freedom, what they're saying. They say, "We want a caliphate; we want to spread our vision."

It took a military action, by the way, to liberate people from that vision in Afghanistan. This wasn't an attack on Islam; this was an attack for liberty. Think about a society in which you two could not function in what you're doing because of your gender. Why? Because the vision of these people—who murder the innocent, by the way, to achieve their vision—is that women aren't equal. And it just so happened that, given the way the

world is today, that that kind of ideologue provided safe haven for people who plotted and killed people in our country. One, I'm not going to stand for it; I'm going to protect America, just like any other leader would protect their own country. And two, one way to achieve long-term peace is to help people realize forms of government that give hope. And so whether it be in Afghanistan and Iraq, we're helping people realize the blessings of freedom. And frankly, the world ought to be in there helping. And they are, many are.

Freedom yields peace. Asia is peaceful. Why? Because freedom is prevailing, that's why. Forms of government matter. And so the ambassador to the OIC or the President or any other representative of America will be expressing this deep desire to work together to achieve peace.

Derwin.

Six-Party Talks/U.S. Foreign Policy in Asia

Q. Mr. President, what do you think you have achieved with regards to U.S. ties with Asia during your time in office? And what do you consider to be unfinished business?

The President. Unfinished business is North Korea. It's—let me just say, it is finishing. In other words, we're making progress. The six-party talks is working. The first step was to get people to the table, to remind people that it's just not the United States with responsibility. The purpose of the—getting all five of us to the table is so that if North Korea tried to say, "Well, I'm really—I said I was going to do it, but I'm not going to do it," then there is somebody else also saying, "And here are the consequences."

And so that's a major step forward. And now it's beginning to work because they're verifiably beginning to shut down the reactor. And so we've got more to do.

So it's finishing but unfinished. "Unfinished" is kind of a loaded word, in a way. Sort of like—the question is, can it happen before I'm through? Yes, it can. I hope so. But I'm not—we're not in control of—we're in control of putting the process in place and making sure it's consequential if somebody doesn't go forward. But it's the leader of

North Korea who gets to make the decision. It's his choice to make. I've made my choice. It's his choice to make.

Let me reiterate a little bit of what I said earlier. The definition of successful foreign policy is to be in a position to work with others to solve problems. And this administration has worked hard to be in a position to convince others to work together to solve problems.

I've just outlined some of the problems, some of the problems—whether or not trade is open and people are treated fairly. One classic example of this is intellectual property rights. I know that's a deep concern to your Government, just like it is to all our Governments, that if you're trading with a country, you want to make sure that those intellectual property rights are treated respectfully.

And in some societies, it's difficult. And therefore, we have to be in a position to work collaboratively and bilaterally to convince countries that in order to be a part of the international world, you have to honor contract. And one contract is, you don't steal somebody else's intellectual property. That's hard work. But nevertheless, those kind of relationships exist now; we're able to have those kind of dialogs.

There's been a lot of cooperation on the security front in remarkable ways since I've been President. The leadership of your country knows full well the dangers of extremism prevailing and have been very strong in working, for example, on the Proliferation Security Initiative. This is an initiative where many APEC nations have agreed to help find and stop the shipment of materials which could end up in the hands of extremists and radicals that could harm us.

And it took awhile to get this relationship in place. But it's a relationship that is necessary to help prevent weapons of mass destruction from being moved. And it's been a very effective relationship. And here's a classic case of a successful collaborative effort.

The biggest danger we have, it seems like to me, is isolationism and protectionism becoming prevalent philosophies. One of the things that this administration has done in working with our friends is to work hard to explain to people the beneficial nature of

trading together. And therefore—and that's manifested, by the way, in, for example, the free trade agreement with Australia, which wasn't a given. And there were some difficulties to overcome in Australia and in the United States, but nevertheless, we got it done. And entering into free trade agreements with other nations, such as Singapore, has been good ways of making sure that we codify the benefits of open trading relationships.

And so there's been a lot of progress made, and the North Korean issue is the issue that we're spending a lot of time on and hopefully we can get completed.

One more round. Geoff.

Leader of the Opposition Kevin Rudd of Australia/President's Upcoming Visit to Australia

Q. Okay. Mr. President, thank you. Just to the domestic scene—we've got Federal elections, as you know, coming up in Australia. Last time around, you had some comments with regards to the then opposition leader's policies on Iraq. You described his policy of withdrawal from Iraq as disastrous. You have a one-on-one meeting with the opposition leader, Kevin Rudd; he's ahead in the polls. He's also got a policy in Iraq which talks about withdrawal, albeit with caveats. I'm just wondering, what's your view of the opposition leader, Kevin Rudd? What will you discuss in the meeting? And what do you make of his Iraq policy?

The President. Yes, first of all, I think it makes sense for me to reach out to leading political figures when I go to other countries. And so I'm looking forward to this meeting. I don't know much about him, frankly. Obviously I haven't—maybe I met him; I don't remember meeting him. When I spoke to the Parliament—

Q. He was an opposition member then.

The President. Could have been shaking hands. I'm going to remind him that, one, the stakes in Iraq are very high for peace; that the liberation of a country—that country was important for peace; and that a democracy—Iraqi-style democracy in the heart of the Middle East is part of winning this ideological struggle. So the first thing I'm going to do is explain to him my views about this—

the world in which we live. And I'll remind him that, as far as I'm concerned, that leaving Iraq before the job is done will cause an enemy that attacked us before to become emboldened. And as John Abizaid put it, to think the enemy will stay there and not follow us here is—in other words, we leave before the job is done, they will follow us home.

That—I will remind him that the best way to conduct policy is based upon conditions on the ground; that success is important; that conditions ought to be driving troop deployments. And that's how—I'll tell him how—what I would hope all our coalition partners would view the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Having said that, I do appreciate very much the fact that the Australians have sacrificed and have served. And I'm looking forward to seeing some Australian troops with Prime Minister Howard to thank them and, as importantly, thank their families for joining America and a lot of other countries in the great cause of liberation and peace.

It's going to be an interesting trip, and what's interesting about these trips is that the time around the table with leaders is important, but also the time sitting down with individuals is important as well. It's a good opportunity to conduct foreign policy. And as I told you, a lot of foreign policy, for me, is the capacity to just look at somebody in the eye and tell them what I think and listen to what they think. It's finding that common ground, if possible, to solve problems. Leaders are problem-solvers. And sometimes you can solve problems by anticipating them and putting the conditions in place so that they won't arise in the first place. And sometimes they just show up, and you better be in a position to deal with them.

War on Terror in Iraq and Afghanistan

Q. Can I just clarify something?

The President. Yes.

Q. Mr. Rudd is—his theater—he's talked about the importance of Afghanistan, talking about withdrawing our troops from Iraq. But do you support that they stay, that view?

The President. Support what view?

Q. That he is determined to—he has determined that the issue on Afghanistan, to keep troops in Afghanistan.

The President. I view both Iraq and Afghanistan as theaters of the same war against radicals and extremists and look forward to sharing my views with Mr. Rudd, of course, and continue our discussions, strategic discussions with John Howard. I mean—all right.

Tia—back to you again.

Abu Bakar Ba'asyir

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. My next question would touch on Indonesian cleric Abu Bakar Ba'asyir.

The President. About what?

Q. Indonesian cleric Abu Bakar Ba'asyir.

The President. Yes, right, right.

Q. As you might know, since he was released from jail, has been exercising activities like any other citizens, including recently—last weekend he inaugurated a long march participated by about 1,000 of his followers, in connection with that commemoration, or welcoming the Ramadan, Islamic fasting month. Actually, how close has your Government monitored the activities of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir? And my main question is do you think Ba'asyir is still dangerous?

The President. First of all, I didn't know he led a parade of a thousand people. So that may answer your first question. I'm sure our Embassy is aware of the activities that take place in your country. I mean, you are a free country where people are allowed to express themselves in the public square, which is a sign of a healthy society.

I am concerned, however, about anybody who preaches violence and extremism and radicalism in a world in which innocent people just get simply murdered for ideological purposes. There were some terrible murders in your country, as you know, just like in mine, and I'm confident that by far the vast majority—all of Indonesia rejects that kind of behavior. Innocent people were killed in Bali for no other reason than they just happened to be vacationing and because somebody wanted to send a political message because they're involved with this ideological struggle. And those of us who want there to be peace have got to reject this kind of behavior.

And so your Government is a government of law; your Government will conduct itself

according to your laws. But anybody who preaches that kind of violence in the name of what I would call a dark political vision needs to be taken seriously.

Japan's Role in the War on Terror

Q. My next question is about the U.S.-Japan relationship and the war on terror.

The President. Yes, sir.

Q. The opposition party in Japan is threatening to cut the extension of Japanese participation in the antiterrorism operations in the Indian Ocean.

The President. Yes.

Q. What do you—question: Are you concerned about that? And will you be—will you raise this issue when you will meet Prime Minister Abe in Australia?

The President. First of all, Japan has been a positive contributor to dealing with the extremists in this ideological war. And I thank the Japanese Government and the people of Japan for their contributions. And I would hope that they would continue to maintain this—their positive influence.

And of course, my conversations with Prime Minister Abe, whom I respect a great deal, will center on the war on terror, as well as a lot of other key issues. Japan has played a significant role in many of the things we've discussed here, like Proliferation Security Initiative, six-party talks. They've been a constructive partner in peace, and I will—we will talk about all aspects of our relationship.

Malaysia-U.S. Relations/Democracy in Malaysia/President's Upcoming Meeting With ASEAN Leaders

Q. Mr. President, tomorrow, August 31st, Malaysia celebrates its 50th—

The President. Fiftieth—make sure my congratulatory remarks get in your article. Headline: Bush Congratulates Malaysia. [Laughter] Do you think that's what it will say?

Q. Something like that.

The President. Upbeat, optimistic George Bush—[laughter].

Q. War on terrorism.

The President. Yes, sure.

Q. It also marks the 50th relations between the U.S. and Malaysia—

The President. Yes.

Q. So what are your outlook and hopes for U.S.-Malaysia relations, and especially with Malaysia being the 10th largest trading partner?

The President. First of all, I do believe we ought to have—take this notion of trade and have meaningful discussions with a potential free trade agreement with Malaysia. Secondly, I respect Prime Minister Badawi, admire his leadership. When his wife died, I tried to call him early just to let him know I cared about him.

Q. He has remarried.

The President. Has he? Good. I'll congratulate him. Thanks for giving me that heads-up. Don't put that in the article, that you had to tell me that. You can put it in there if you want. [Laughter] I'll be glad to—I'm going to congratulate him. That's neat.

Mr. Wilder. You did, sir.

The President. What?

Mr. Wilder. You did congratulate him.

The President. Exactly. I'm going to congratulate him again. [Laughter] I'll double the congratulations. [Laughter] That's right; I did write him a note. I forgot. Did I call him or write him a note?

Mr. Wilder. You wrote him a note.

The President. That's right, yes. Sent him a couple flowers. Anyway, Malaysia is an interesting example of how a free society can deal with movements that could conceivably change and alter the nature of the free society. And I respect the way the Prime Minister has used freedom and used the openness of society to kind of deal with frustration. I mean, all societies have frustrated people. And the question is, will the outlet of that frustration lead to violence or lead to peace? And Malaysia is an example of a country where frustrations have been channeled in a constructive way. And therefore, he's a leader, as far as I'm concerned, and a very constructive force for Southeast Asia.

By the way, I am going to meet with the ASEAN leaders, which is an important meeting as well. It's an opportunity for the United States to stay very much engaged with ASEAN. I unfortunately will not be there for the 60th, but look forward to having an event that would kind of recognize the importance of ASEAN as far as the United States is concerned.

**President's Upcoming Meeting With
ASEAN Leaders/Alternative Fuel
Sources/Environment**

Q. So this is a side meeting with the ASEAN leaders after APEC meeting, sir?

The President. Yes, a side meeting with the ASEAN leaders at APEC. I try to do that every time. So they'll have somebody like—I'll sit down and meet with the ASEAN nations as well.

The other thing that's interesting about Malaysia is, they're going to be one of the leaders on alternative fuels.

Q. Biofuel.

The President. Biofuels—absolutely. And that's another area where we can work together. As you know, I'm an alternative fuels person. I believe that it's in our interests that we develop the technologies necessary to deal with energy dependence as well as greenhouse gases. Back to the climate changes—the way—if you're truly interested in dealing with greenhouse gases, people need to focus on the development of technologies that will enable us to, on the one hand, grow our economies, on the other hand, be good stewards of the environment.

Just for the record—and this probably won't be a headline, although I've tried to make it one a lot—when it comes time to climate change, there's one major industrialized nation that actually grew its economy and reduced greenhouse gases, that would be the United States of America—that actually had greenhouse gases go down and the economy go up. So something is working here, and it's technologies, use of technologies. And so I'm going to be reminding people about—that we can come up with a strategy that doesn't impoverish our people and, at the same time, takes advantage of technologies. And we're going to need to share some technologies with newly emerging economies in order to achieve this objective.

Anyway, I forgot to make that point.

Q. Mr. President, there appears to be—

The President. I'm not making the point to you, as you can tell. That's why I'm kind of looking over your shoulder. [*Laughter*]

Asia-Pacific Region-U.S. Relations

Q. There appears to be a perception in Southeast Asia that this administration has neglected the region. How do you plan to convince them otherwise when you meet in APEC?

The President. Well, I—do you want to ask another question, because I already answered it. I'll be glad to answer it again—which is, we've got strong bilateral—first of all, the number of trips I've taken—I've gone to every APEC meeting. I've spent a lot of time with leaders both here and in your respective countries—that we've got relations to a point where we can work together to solve common problems. PSI is one such example of a strategy we've implemented to deal with the realities of the world. North Korea is another example.

And so it's—the truth of the matter is, I spend a lot of time working on Asian matters. And all I'll ask you to do is, look at the results of the individual relationships and the ability to put processes in place to deal with the threats we live in and the capacity to work together to solve problems and to create opportunities. And to me, that's a sign of a healthy, robust relationship with an important part of the world.

Okay. Thank you all. Enjoyed it. Looking forward to making the trip.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 11:30 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Prime Minister John Howard of Australia; Chairman Kim Jong Il of North Korea; President Hu Jintao of China; President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia; Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan; Sakie Yokata, mother of Megumi Yokata, who was abducted by North Korean authorities; and Gen. John P. Abizaid, USA, combatant commander, U.S. Central Command. A reporter referred to Mark Latham, former leader, Australian Labour Party. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 31. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With David Speers of Sky News

August 30, 2007

Australia's Role in the War on Terror

Mr. Speers. Mr. President, the United States has around 160,000 troops in Iraq at the moment. Australia has, in its battle group, only around 500 in the relatively safe Dhi Qar Province. Is this just a symbolic contribution? Would it really matter if they were brought home?

The President. First, I want to thank the Howard Government and the people of Australia for joining this global struggle against extremists and radicals who are trying to impose their vision on the world. And that struggle is found—being played out in Iraq and Afghanistan right now and other places.

And so I view Australia's contribution to peace and freedom as more than just Iraq. I view it as, one, a strategic partnership with the United States. I view their contribution as intelligence contributions. But I also understand that there's a commitment to helping people live in freedom as a long-term solution to this ideological struggle.

And I'm often asked about coalition troops. And my attitude is, our coalition partners ought to be making decisions based upon conditions on the ground, because failure in Iraq would lead to, in my judgment, to turmoil, chaos in the Middle East, and other attacks on the United States and other nations. Success will be a major blow to these radicals and extremists that will make it easier for us to say we've done our duty and laid the foundation for peace.

Leader of the Opposition Kevin Rudd of Australia/War on Terror

Mr. Speers. Well, as you know, there's an election only 2 or 3 months away in Australia, and Kevin Rudd, the Opposition Leader, is ahead in all of the polls. And he has promised to pull those combat troops out of Iraq if he wins. He says he'll consult with the U.S. So, if he does win, what would you be saying to him? Would you be trying to convince him not to do that?

The President. Well, actually, I believe he's on my calendar. I, of course, will be meeting with the Prime Minister, and then

I'll be meeting with Mr. Rudd, and I'm looking forward to it. He doesn't know me, and I don't know him. And so I look forward to sharing my views and would ask, if he were to win, that he consider conditions on the ground before making any decisions; that what matters is success. And I believe we can be successful. And I know it's important to be successful. And I will be glad to explain to him why I'm optimistic that this hard work will achieve what we all want, which is, over time, fewer troops and peace. The main thing we want is to make sure that we deal these radicals and extremists a major blow, which is success in Iraq.

See, here's the interesting thing that I hope the people of Australia understand: There are two forms of extremism that have now converged on Iraq. One is Sunni extremism in the likes of Al Qaida. These people in Iraq swore allegiance to the very same person that ordered the attack on the United States of America. Sunni extremists have killed Australians. Sunni extremists that are inspired by this ideology are killing around the world.

And then there's the strain of Shiism extremism that is fostered by Iran. And these are the two major threats to world peace, and they've converged on Iraq, which should say that we need to do the hard work necessary so we can have peace in the long term for children growing up both in the United States and Australia.

War on Terror in Afghanistan and Iraq

Mr. Speers. So you need those Australian troops there.

The President. We need all our coalition partners. And I would hope that—and I understand, look, everybody has got their own internal politics. My only point is, is that whether it be Afghanistan or Iraq, we've got more work to do. We, the free world, has got more work to do. And I believe those of us who live in liberty have a responsibility to promote forms of government that deal with what causes 19 kids to get on airplanes to kill 3,000 students [citizens].*

* White House correction.

United Kingdom's Role in Iraq

Mr. Speers. What, then, do you say about the British withdrawing significant numbers from southern Iraq in what many of your officers say is still a dangerous zone of the country?

The President. Well, I've talked to—I've said the exact same thing to Gordon Brown: Make sure you're dictated by conditions on the ground. And he—listen, that's exactly what he said he's going to do.

Mr. Speers. So that's not premature, that British withdrawal.

The President. Well, he said that he's going to make decisions based upon conditions. And by the way, the Brits are going to keep a presence. When you say "withdraw," it makes it sound like all their troops are coming home, but that's not what's going to happen.

Mr. Speers. But a significant number of them are.

The President. Well, you know, he will let me know when he makes that decision. He has said that he is going to make decisions in southern Iraq based upon conditions. They're now moved out of the Basra Palace into an air base, which is fine. But they will have a presence there to help this Iraqi Government succeed.

Australian Elections/Australia-U.S. Relations

Mr. Speers. You've had a very close relationship with John Howard. You famously called him the "man of steel." If he doesn't win the election, and Kevin Rudd does become Prime Minister, given that you have differences over such a big issue as Iraq, will the alliance still be the same? Will the relationship be the same?

The President. I refuse to accept your hypothesis.

Mr. Speers. If he wins.

The President. Well, that's if. You're asking me to answer a hypothetical.

Mr. Speers. But will the alliance change?

The President. All I can tell you is, is that I remember John Howard has been behind in polls before and he's won. And so certainly, I'm not going to prejudge the decision of the Australian people. And I will end up dealing with whomever and work hard to make sure that the Australian and U.S. rela-

tionship is good. But I don't buy into your hypothesis.

Mr. Speers. But essentially, the relationship won't suffer if Kevin Rudd becomes Prime Minister?

The President. Look, I'll be glad to deal with the situation. See, that's a loaded question. In this sense, you're trying to get me to predict the outcome of the election, and I'm not going to do it. I don't know enough about it, and I am going down there to deal with the current Prime Minister, who, no doubt about it, is a close personal friend of mine. And I think a man—he is a man of steel, because he's a person who stands on conviction and principle. I don't know Mr. Rudd; I'm looking forward to getting to know him. But that's all I really want to comment about your elections.

Mr. Speers. A lot of Australians will be weighing out, what's going to happen to the alliance if Labor wins the election?

The President. Yes, as I said, I really am not going to get involved in your election down there. I am going to be—I'm going down as the U.S. President, proud of the relationship between the United States and Australia. It is a relationship based upon our common values; it's a relationship based upon good economic ties; and it's a really important relationship. And I presume whoever the U.S. President is after me and the Prime Ministers to come in Australia will understand how important that is.

China

Mr. Speers. Labor also wants the alliance to focus more on China and its military build-up in particular, its nuclear arms stocks. Should more attention be given to that and China's tensions with Japan?

The President. Well, we spend a lot of time on China in this administration. I've got good relations with both the Japanese and Chinese leadership. My view is, is that it's important for there to be an active U.S. presence in Asia, precisely to make sure that old tensions don't flare up.

And I'm pleased with the progress that's being made in Asia. And obviously, the interesting relationship now in Asia is the trading relationship. Australia, fortunately, has got a surplus with China. And America, however, has got a major deficit with China.

Mr. Speers. Does the military issue concern you?

The President. It only concerns me if there's hostility. In other words, it only concerns me if the Government declares its hostility toward the world. I happen to believe that China's most important issue internally is for them to grow their economy to deal with—they've got to create, like, 25 million new jobs a year in order to stay even, in order to keep their economy growing. And so therefore, my view of China is that they're internally focused to the extent that they want economic growth and vitality; they're externally focused in order to get the raw materials they need. But if they ever turn hostile, I would be concerned about, you know, a military——

President's Upcoming Visit to Australia

Mr. Speers. Mr. President, just finally, a lot of Sydneysiders are complaining about the impost of APEC, in particular your security detail and how that will affect the city for a week while you're there, almost a week while you're there. Do you have any message for them?

The President. Well, first I'm looking forward to coming to the beautiful city, and to the extent that I inconvenience them, I apologize. I'm not exactly sure what you're talking about, in terms of——

Mr. Speers. The security lockdown in the city.

The President. It's the first—thank you for sharing that with me. I got a lot on my mind, and one of the things that's one [on]* my mind is I'm looking forward to coming to one of the most beautiful cities in the world. If I inconvenience people, that's not my intent. My intent is to represent my country in an important meeting in a country that I admire a lot and a country with whom we've got great relations. And it's important that we continue to have great relations.

I hope people—I hope people understand why it's done, and I just hope it doesn't disrupt their lives too much.

Mr. Speers. Mr. President, we do look forward to seeing you in Sydney. Thank you very much for your time.

* White House correction.

The President. I'm looking forward to it. Thank you for your time.

Mr. Speers. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 3:39 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to Prime Minister John Howard of Australia; and Prime Minister Gordon Brown of the United Kingdom. This transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 31. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Kensuke Okoshi of NHK Japan

August 30, 2007

Japan-U.S. Relations/Japan's Antiterrorism Law

Mr. Okoshi. Thank you, Mr. President. My first question is on the U.S.-Japan alliance. It has been said that relationship between our two countries grew closer than ever before under your leadership. On the other hand, in Japan, the opposition party blocked the extension of the antiterrorism special law, which can be seen as a symbol of the U.S.-Japan alliance. How serious do you think this is?

The President. First of all, we do have a good relationship with Japan, and it's an important relationship. The relationship between the United States and Japan is good for the American people; I believe it's good for the Japanese people; and I believe it's good for stability in not only Southeast Asia but where we cooperate in other parts of the world. And so therefore, I would hope that the Government would keep this important law in place so that Japan and the United States and other nations can continue to work for peace and stability. And it's an important piece of legislation, as far as we're concerned.

President's Meeting With Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan

Mr. Okoshi. Will you talk about this issue, about the extension of the antiterrorism special law with Prime Minister Abe at the next meeting in Sydney?

The President. I'm not exactly sure what he wants to talk about. I'd be happy to talk about anything he wants. Of course I'll be wanting to make sure that our relationship remains as close as it is. Secondly, we'll be talking about economic issues. Thirdly, I know we'll be talking about North Korea, and I will once again make it clear that the abductee issue is an important issue for the United States of America. We want this issue resolved.

This battle against extremism and radicalism that is manifested in two theaters right now, which is Afghanistan and Iraq, is going to be a subject matter. And to the extent that we can work together, it's going to be helpful for peace. The Japanese presence helps peace, helps achieve peace. And that's what we want. We'll talk about every aspect of our relationship.

Six-Party Talks

Mr. Okoshi. On North Korea, in conjunction with six-party talks, there has been an effort regarding the U.S.-North Korea bilateral meeting. Do you regard this softer and more direct approach towards North Korea as a success?

The President. The discussion was as a part of the six-party talks. I am not for undermining the six-party talks. As a matter of fact, the six-party talks is the most successful forum, because I want to make it clear to the North Koreans that should they choose to ignore what they've agreed to do, that it's not just the United States that will be at the table, but China and, of course, Japan and South Korea and Russia. So in other words, there's got to be a sense of accountability if somebody says they're going to do one thing, like shut down their weapons programs, and they don't do it. And there's going to be better accountability when they have said that to five countries as opposed to one. And so it's important that we all stay at the table.

My approach hasn't changed. My approach is firm. They're making some progress now. Obviously, we want to make sure that this continues. But the reactor has been shut down. But they've got a lot more work to do.

Abduction of Japanese Citizens

Mr. Okoshi. How much will the abductee issue be taken into consideration in terms of removing North Korea from the State Sponsors of Terrorism?

The President. I told the Prime Minister this is an important issue for me. Our Ambassador, Ambassador Schieffer, asked me to meet the mom of a young girl who had been abducted. And that's probably the most—one of the most profound meetings I've had in the Oval Office, to see her emotion, to feel her sense of hurt as a result of the callous actions of a state.

And so the abductee issue is an important issue. Of course the Japanese are concerned that what will happen is, is that we'll conclude the nuclear weapons issue and then forget about the abductee issue. And the answer is, I won't forget about the abductee issue.

War on Terror in Iraq

Mr. Okoshi. Moving on to Iraq. You made a decision to implement surge. And so far, what are some of the things that have met with your expectation, and on the other hand, what are the elements that have fallen short?

The President. First of all, the surge, from a military perspective, from a security perspective, is successful. There are still suicide bombers, and there are still these murderers who are killing people, but we're slowly but surely, along with the Iraqis, taking back neighborhoods and Provinces. Al Anbar Province used to be a safe haven—not a safe haven, used to be kind of the grounds where it looked like Al Qaida was going to be the predominant force, and now we've got them on the run. And so there's been success in the security.

That's not to say everything is perfect, but there's been good successes. At the grass-roots level, in other words at the local level, when people feel secure, they start asking questions about what does it take to create peace so their families can grow up peacefully. In other words, when the thugs get removed and people start saying, "I've got a different attitude," that's called reconciliation. They're beginning to say, "What do we need to do to build on this momentum, so we can live in peace?"

At the Government level, they're still struggling with—frankly, trying to recover from a dictatorship. And it takes awhile. And we've asked them to—hopefully they would pass some laws—some laws they haven't passed. But I believe, one, we can succeed; two, I know it's important that we do succeed. And I'm looking forward to our people on the ground coming back and charting a way forward so that we can continue to be in a position to succeed.

Environment

Mr. Okoshi. Moving on to your climate change. Are you really inviting the major emitters, including China, to Washington, DC, at the end of this month? What kind of initiatives or roadmaps do you have in mind for the post-Kyoto framework?

The President. Yes, look, I think we need to make sure that we get the major emitters, the big economies of the world that are emitting greenhouse gases to the table so that we can all be at the same table. And the first step toward coming up with a common accord is to recognize there's a problem and set a goal, a reduction goal, because I believe once you get people to sign up to a goal, it makes it easier to begin to get—ask them to sign up to a solution.

So that's the purpose. The purpose is to set up a process that includes everybody. Now, the United States, by the way, has reduced greenhouse gas emissions last year. We grew our economy at about 3 percent, and our greenhouse gases went down. So our strategy is beginning to work. But the truth of the matter is, if we really want to be serious about solving this problem, the question is, how fast can we get new technologies to the marketplace? And the countries that are going to be leading the way and developing new technologies will be the United States and Japan.

For example, I believe that the Japanese battery makers will be coming to the market, hopefully relatively soon, with a new battery that will enable us to drive a regular-size automobile for 40 miles on electricity. That will, of course, achieve a couple of objectives: one, less dependence on oil, which will help both our countries, and two, it will help us clean up the environment. And so technologies is going to really make an enormous difference. And to the extent that the United

States and Japan cooperates on technologies, it will help the world. We're wealthy nations, and these developing nations are going to look to us to help them develop technologies that will enable them to grow their economies and, at the same time, be better stewards of the environment.

So the way I see it is, post-Kyoto is going to be setting goals, helping countries with the technological developments they need so that each country could meet the goal it sets. And collectively we'll have done a better job on the environment.

Mr. Okoshi. Time is up. Thank you very much, Mr. President—

The President. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Okoshi. —for spending time for Japanese people.

The President. Glad to do it. Proud to be a friend. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 3:50 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to Sakie Yokata, mother of Megumi Yokata, who was abducted by North Korean authorities. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 31.

Proclamation 8171—National Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Week, 2007

August 30, 2007

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

During National Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Week, we recognize the vital contributions of the brave men and women who serve our great Nation, and we pay tribute to the employers who support them.

The courageous men and women of the National Guard and Reserve are fighting a new and unprecedented war, having answered the call to defend our freedom and way of life. At home, the National Guard is working to protect our borders, and provide vital aid and assistance in times of crisis and natural disasters. The dedicated service of those who wear the uniform reflects the best of America, and all Americans are proud to stand behind the men and women of the National Guard and Reserve.

Our Nation also appreciates the sacrifice of employers across our country who support the important mission of our National Guard and Reserve personnel. Employers across America demonstrate their patriotism by providing time off, pay, health-care benefits, and job security to their Guard and Reserve employees, helping them prepare for their return to families and to civilian life. The commitment of our Nation's employers is a vital and integral part of the success of our Armed Forces.

During National Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Week, we offer our country's deepest gratitude to the dedicated men and women of the National Guard and Reserve and to the employers who support them in their important service to our Nation.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim September 9 through September 15, 2007, as National Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Week. I encourage all Americans to join me in expressing our thanks to members of our National Guard and Reserve and their civilian employers for their patriotism and sacrifices on behalf of our Nation. I also call upon State and local officials, private organizations, businesses, and all military commanders to observe this week with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this thirtieth day of August, in the year of our Lord two thousand seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-second.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., September 4, 2007]

NOTE: This proclamation was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 31, and it will be published in the *Federal Register* on September 5.

Remarks on Homeownership Financing and an Exchange With Reporters

August 31, 2007

The President. Good morning. Thank you for joining me. Secretary Paulson and Secretary Jackson gave me an update on the strong fundamentals of our Nation's economy. Economic growth is healthy, and just yesterday we learned that our economy grew at a strong rate of 4 percent in the second quarter of this year. Wages are rising; unemployment is low; exports are up; and steady job creation continues.

We also had a good discussion about the situation in America's financial markets. The markets are in a period of transition as participants reassess and reprice risk. This process has been unfolding for some time, and it's going to take more time to fully play out. As it does, America's overall economy will remain strong enough to weather any turbulence.

One area that has shown particular strain is the mortgage market, especially what's known as the subprime sector of the mortgage market. This market has seen tremendous innovation in recent years as new lending products make credit available to more people. For the most part, this has been a positive development, and the reason why is, millions of families have taken out mortgages to buy their homes and American homeownership is at a near alltime high.

Unfortunately, there's also been some excesses in the lending industry. One of the most troubling developments has been the increase in adjustable rate mortgages that start out with a very low interest rate and then reset to a higher rate after a few years. This has led some homeowners to take out loans larger than they could afford based on overly optimistic assumptions about the future performance of the housing market. Others may have been confused by the terms of their loan or misled by irresponsible lenders. Whatever the reason they chose this kind of mortgage, some borrowers are now unable to make their monthly payments or facing foreclosure.

Complicating the situation for borrowers is the nature of today's mortgage market. In

many cases, the neighborhood banker who issued a family's mortgage does not own that mortgage for long. Instead, mortgages are sold as securities on the global market. And that makes it harder for the lender and borrower to renegotiate.

The recent disturbances in the subprime mortgage industry are modest—they're modest in relation to the size of our economy. But if you're a family—if your family is one of those having trouble making the monthly payments, this problem doesn't seem modest at all. I understand these concerns, and therefore, I've made this a top priority to help our homeowners navigate these financial challenges so that many families as possible can stay in their homes. That's what we've been working on, a plan to help homeowners.

We've got a role—the Government has got a role to play, but it is limited. A Federal bailout of lenders would only encourage a recurrence of the problem. It's not the Government's job to bail out speculators or those who made the decision to buy a home they knew they could never afford. Yet there are many American homeowners who could get through this difficult time with a little flexibility from their lenders or a little help from their Government. So I strongly urge lenders to work with homeowners to adjust their mortgages. I believe lenders have a responsibility to help these good people to renegotiate so they can stay in their home. And today I'm going to outline a variety of steps at the Federal level to help American families keep their homes.

First, we're going to work to modernize and improve the Federal Housing Administration—that's known as the FHA. The FHA is a Government Agency that provides mortgage insurance to borrowers through a network of private sector lenders. Sixteen months ago, I sent Congress an FHA modernization bill that would help more homeowners qualify for this insurance by lowering downpayment requirements, by increasing loan limits, and providing more flexibility in pricing. These reforms would allow the FHA to reach families that need help, those with low incomes, less-than-perfect credit records, or little savings.

Last year, the House passed this bill with more than 400 votes. Unfortunately, Congress hasn't acted this year. It would be a good task for Congress to come and get FHA modernization done so that we can help these people refinance their homes, so more people can stay in their homes. I look forward to signing a bill as quickly as possible.

In the coming days, the FHA will launch a new program called FHASecure. This program will allow American homeowners who have got good credit history but cannot afford their current payments to refinance into FHA-insured mortgages. This means that many families who are struggling now will be able to refinance their loans, meet their monthly payments, and keep their homes. In other words, we're going to start reaching out and making sure people know that this option is available to them so they can stay in their homes.

Second, I'm going to work with Congress to temporarily reform a key housing provision of the Federal Tax Code, which will make it easier for homeowners to refinance their mortgages during this time of market stress. Under current law, homeowners who are unable to meet their mortgage payments can face an unexpected tax bill. For example, let's say the value of your house declines by \$20,000 and your adjustable rate mortgage payments have grown to a level you cannot afford. If the bank modifies your mortgage and forgives \$20,000 of your loan, the Tax Code treats that \$20,000 as taxable income. When your home is losing value and your family is under financial stress, the last thing you need to do is to be hit with higher taxes.

So I believe we need to change the Code to make it easier for people to refinance their homes and stay in their homes. And to this end, I've called Senator Debbie Stabenow of Michigan and told her that she's on to a good idea with the bill that she and George Voinovich have submitted to the Senate. The House has got Rob Andrews of New Jersey and Ron Lewis of Kentucky introducing legislation that is a positive step toward changing the Tax Code so people aren't penalized when they refinance their homes. With a few changes in the Senate version and the House version, this administration can support these bills, and we look forward to working with

them—the Senators and the Members of the House—to pass commonsense legislation to help us address this issue.

Third, my administration will launch a new foreclosure avoidance initiative to help struggling homeowners find a way to refinance. Secretary Jackson and Secretary Paulson are going to reach out to a wide variety of groups that offer foreclosure counseling and refinancing for American homeowners. These groups include community organizations like NeighborWorks and mortgage lenders and loan servicers and the FHA as well as Government-sponsored enterprises like Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. These organizations exist to help people refinance, and we expect them to do that.

See, it's easy for me to stand up here and talk about refinancing—some people don't even know what I'm talking about. And we need to have a focused effort to help people understand the mortgage financing options available to them or to identify homeowners before they face hardships and help them understand what's possible.

Finally, the Federal Government is taking a variety of actions to make the mortgage industry more transparent, more reliable, and more fair so we can reduce the likelihood that these kind of lending problems won't happen again. Federal banking regulators are improving disclosure requirements to ensure that lenders provide homeowners with complete and accurate and understandable information about their mortgages, including the possibility that their monthly payments could rise dramatically. In other words, we believe that if the consumer is better informed, these kind of problems won't arise—are less likely to arise in the first place. Banking regulators are also strengthening lending standards to help ensure that borrowers are not approved for mortgages larger than they can handle.

This administration will soon issue regulations that require mortgage brokers to fully disclose their fees and closing costs. We're pursuing wrongdoing and fraud in the mortgage industry through the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Justice, the Federal Trade Commission, and other Agencies. In other words, if you've been cheating somebody, we're going to find you and hold you to account.

And we'll continue to do our part to help improve all aspects of the mortgage marketplace that is really important to this economy of ours.

With all the steps I've outlined today, we will deliver help and hope to American families who need it. We'll help guard against future problems in the housing sector. We'll reaffirm the vital place of homeownership in our Nation. When more families own their own homes, neighborhoods are more vibrant and communities are stronger and more people have a stake in the future of this country.

Owning a home has always been at the center of the American Dream. Together with the United States Congress, I will continue working to help make that dream a reality for more of our citizens. Thank you.

Banking Industry

Q. Sir, what about the hedge funds and banks that are overexposed on the subprime market? That's a bigger problem. Have you got a plan?

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:05 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House.

Remarks on the Resignation of Tony Snow as Press Secretary and the Appointment of Dana Perino as Press Secretary and an Exchange With Reporters

August 31, 2007

The President. Thank you. Good afternoon to you.

Tony Snow informed me he's leaving. And I sadly accept his desire to leave the White House, and he'll do so on September the 14th. He is—it's been a joy to watch him spar with you. He's smart; he's capable; he's witty. He's capable of—he's able to talk about issues in a way that the American people can understand.

And I don't know what he's going to do; I'm not sure he does yet either. But whatever it is, it's going to be—two things: One, he'll battle cancer and win, and secondly, he'll be a solid contributor to society.

I do want to thank Jill and Kendall, Robbie and Kristi. They have watched a man they love take on a big job and, at the same time, fight disease with a lot of courage. And so I accept; I love you; and I wish you all the best.

And so I had to make a choice, who to replace Tony, and I've chosen Dana Perino. I did so because Dana is a smart, capable person who is able to spell out the issues of the day in a way that people listening on TV can understand. She can handle you all. *[Laughter]* She's capable of handling your questions.

Q. She has done—*[inaudible]*.

The President. She has? Good. Okay. I'm glad to get a little—I'm glad to get that choir singing. *[Laughter]* So I'm not worried about her standing here at the podium. What I look for in somebody like Dana is somebody who can walk in that Oval Office and give me sound judgment and good advice. And I have found that over the course of the time I've known her, she's capable of doing that. And she's also capable of running the shop that she'll be in charge of.

And so we say to the man we admire a lot, good luck; Godspeed. And to Dana Perino, I'm looking forward to working with you, and I'm looking forward to the American people to get to know you like I've gotten to know you.

Tony.

President's Staff

Q. You've lost a lot of members in your administration—

The President. Hold up there, we're not quite through yet. *[Laughter]*

[At this point, Press Secretary Snow and Press Secretary-designate Perino made remarks.]

The President. Thank you.

President's Staff

Q. How do you feel about losing everybody?

The President. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:45 p.m. in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of

Press Secretary Snow and Press Secretary-designate Perino.

Statement Following a Meeting With Military Leaders

August 31, 2007

The Vice President and I met today with Secretary of Defense Gates and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. We had a very productive discussion.

We discussed our commitment to provide our military all it needs to meet the challenges of this new century. This includes a larger Army and Marine Corps. In January, I accepted Secretary Gates's recommendation to increase the overall strength of the two services by 92,000 soldiers and marines over the next 5 years. This will strengthen our military and help reset our forces to respond to multiple contingencies around the world at any given moment. The effort is well underway, but there is more to do, and the Joint Chiefs are doing a terrific job monitoring the health of our All-Volunteer Force.

We also discussed military and civilian coordination. We now have joint civilian and military teams deployed in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa, and the Philippines. In Iraq, we have more than doubled the number of civilian-led Provincial Reconstruction Teams this year, most of which are embedded with U.S. combat brigades. These teams are a force multiplier for our men and women in uniform, and they are essential to the bottom-up political progress taking place in Anbar, Diyala, and other Provinces across Iraq. The Civilian Reserve Corps now being developed will enlarge the pool of civilian volunteers to support and enhance our missions.

The American people will soon hear an assessment of the situation on the ground in Iraq and recommendations from Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus. This status report comes less than 3 months since our new strategy became fully operational and will assess what is going well, what can be improved, and what adjustments might be made in the coming months. Congress asked

for this assessment, and Members of Congress should withhold judgment until they have heard it.

The stakes in Iraq are too high and the consequences too grave for our security here at home to allow politics to harm the mission of our men and women in uniform. It is my hope that we can put partisanship and politics behind us and commit to a common vision that will provide our troops what they need to succeed and secure our vital national interests in Iraq and around the world.

I always leave these meetings inspired by our men and women in uniform and resolved to do everything I can to support them. The brave men and women of our Armed Forces and their families are making heroic sacrifices to secure our country. America will honor these sacrifices by ensuring that our children and grandchildren inherit a more peaceful, just, and democratic world.

NOTE: The statement referred to Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq.

Message on the Observance of Labor Day

August 31, 2007

I send greetings to those celebrating Labor Day 2007.

Our country's economy is built on the hard work and ingenuity of the American people. There is no limit to what our citizens can accomplish when they have the skills to compete and the freedom to achieve their dreams. Through vision and determination, American workers are transforming their neighborhoods, strengthening our economy, and realizing the great promise of our Nation.

Today, productivity is high, consumers are confident, and incomes are rising across our country. Our economy has experienced one of the fastest growth rates of any major industrialized nation. More than 8.3 million jobs have been created in America since August 2003, and the unemployment rate remains low. My Administration is committed to promoting pro-growth economic policies, keeping taxes low, and supporting small busi-

nesses to keep our economy strong and growing.

On Labor Day, we honor the hard work and dedication of the men and women of our workforce. Their efforts contribute to the prosperity of our great Nation.

Laura and I send our best wishes.

George W. Bush

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this message.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

August 25

In the morning, at the Bush Ranch in Crawford, TX, the President had an intelligence briefing.

August 26

In the afternoon, the President and Mrs. Bush had lunch with Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales and his wife, Rebecca Turner Gonzales.

The President declared a major disaster in Wisconsin and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms and flooding beginning on August 18 and continuing.

August 27

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he traveled to Albuquerque, NM, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Pat Dee. While en route aboard Air Force One, he had separate telephone conversations with President Jalal Talabani, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, and Vice Presidents Tariq al-Hashimi and Adil Abd Al-Mahdi of Iraq, and Masoud Barzani, president, Kurdistan region in Iraq.

In the afternoon, at a private residence, the President attended a People for Pete

Domenici reception. Later, he traveled to Bellevue, WA, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Bernie Krane. While en route aboard Air Force One, he had a telephone conversation with Scott Kellogg, deputy director, Rio Rancho Police Department, NM, to express his condolences for the death of Rio Rancho Police Officer Germaine Casey, who was killed in a motorcycle accident while protecting the President's motorcade.

Later in the afternoon, while en route to the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, the President had a telephone conversation with Lisa Casey, wife of police officer Germaine Casey, to express his condolences for the death of her husband.

In the evening, the President traveled to Reno, NV, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Cathy Levine.

The President declared a major disaster in Ohio and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms, flooding, and tornadoes beginning on August 20 and continuing.

August 28

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he met with family members of military personnel killed in the war on terror.

In the afternoon, the President traveled to New Orleans, LA, where, upon arrival in the evening, he was joined by Mrs. Bush. While en route aboard Air Force One, he had a telephone conversation with President-elect Abdullah Gul of Turkey to congratulate him on his election victory.

Later in the evening, the President met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Allison Stouse.

August 29

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Charter School for Science and Technology, he and Mrs. Bush participated in a meeting with Louisiana education officials. They then participated in a moment of silence to honor the second anniversary of Hurricane Katrina.

Later in the morning, the President and Mrs. Bush traveled to Bay St. Louis, MS, arriving in the afternoon.

Later in the afternoon, at Our Lady of the Gulf Parish Community Center, the President and Mrs. Bush participated in a briefing on Mississippi rebuilding efforts. Later, they returned to Washington, DC.

The President declared a major disaster in Nebraska and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms and flooding from June 11–16.

August 30

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

The White House announced that the President will welcome Prime Minister Jose Socrates of Portugal to the White House on September 17 in his dual roles as Prime Minister and President of the European Council.

The President declared a major disaster in Illinois and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms and flooding from August 7–8.

August 31

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

The President declared a major disaster in New York and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the areas struck by severe storms, flooding, and tornadoes on August 8.

The President declared a major disaster in Oklahoma and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms, flooding, and tornadoes from May 24–June 1.

Nominations Submitted to the Senate

NOTE: No nominations were submitted to the Senate during the period covered by this issue.

Checklist of White House Press Releases

The following list contains releases of the Office of the Press Secretary that are neither printed as items nor covered by entries in the Digest of Other White House Announcements.

Released August 26

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to Wisconsin

Released August 27

Transcript of a press gaggle by Deputy Press Secretary Scott M. Stanzel

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to Ohio

Released August 28

Transcript of a press gaggle by Deputy Press Secretary Scott M. Stanzel and Gulf Coast Region Recovery and Rebuilding Coordinator Donald E. Powell

Fact sheet: Making America Safer by Defeating Extremists in the Middle East

Released August 29

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to Nebraska

Fact sheet: The Two-Year Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina

Released August 30

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Tony Snow

Transcript of a press briefing by National Security Council Senior Director for Asian Affairs Dennis Wilder and Deputy National Security Adviser for International Economic Affairs Dan Price on the President's trip to Australia and the APEC summit

Statement by the Press Secretary: Visit of Portuguese Prime Minister Jose Socrates

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to Illinois

Released August 31

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Tony Snow

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to New York

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to Oklahoma

Fact sheet: New Steps To Help Homeowners Avoid Foreclosure

Acts Approved by the President

NOTE: No acts approved by the President were received by the Office of the Federal Register during the period covered by this issue.